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Lindy's SPORTS

# PRO FOOTBALL DRAFT 2019

## MOCK DRAFT

## PLAYER RANKINGS AND ANALYSIS

## SLEEPERS AND BUSTS

## NFL TEAM REPORTS

## LOADED UP FRONT

### LINDY'S TOP 10

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | DE | Nick Bosa | Ohio State |
| 2. | DT | Quinnen Williams | Alabama |
| 3. | DT | Ed Oliver | Houston |
| 4. | DE | Clelin Ferrell | Clemson |
| 5. | QB | Dwayne Haskins Jr. | Ohio State |
| 6. | CB | Greedy Williams | LSU |
| 7. | DE | Rashan Gary | Michigan |
| 8. | OT | Jonah Williams | Alabama |
| 9. | OLB | Josh Allen | Kentucky |
| 10. | ILB | Devin White | LSU |

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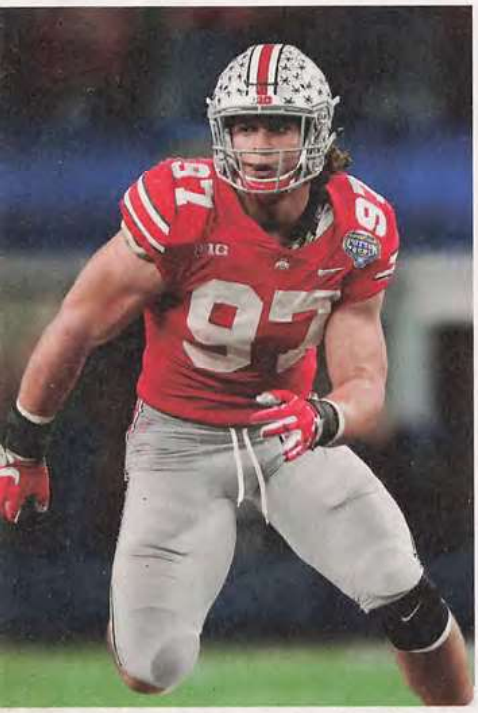


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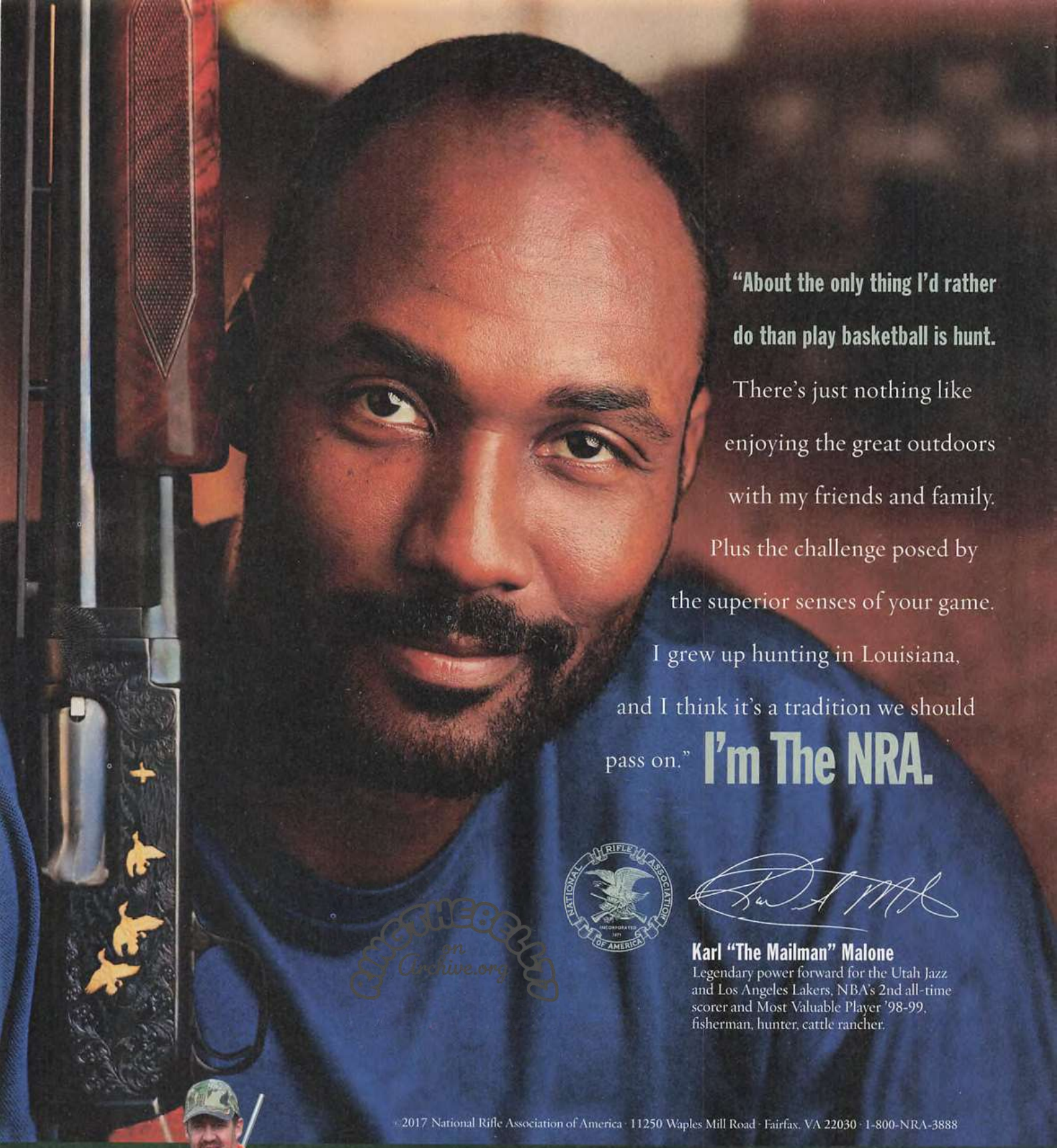
Player movement after this date is not reflected in this magazine.
Starters listed on the team pages are the starters at the end of last season or before being injured.



**"About the only thing I'd rather do than play basketball is hunt.** There's just nothing like enjoying the great outdoors with my friends and family. Plus the challenge posed by the superior senses of your game. I grew up hunting in Louisiana, and I think it's a tradition we should pass on." **I'm The NRA.**

**Karl "The Mailman" Malone**
Legendary power forward for the Utah Jazz and Los Angeles Lakers, NBA's 2nd all-time scorer and Most Valuable Player '98-99, fisherman, hunter, cattle rancher.

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**Did You Know ... "Intense nationwide demand for youth firearms education and safety training is why the NRA works with groups like the Boy Scouts of America, American Legion, 4-H and FFA to develop shooting programs that reach more than 1 million young people annually."**

Wayne LaPierre, NRA Executive Vice President

# NFLDRAFTSCOUT.COM TOP 100

| Rk | Pos. | Name | School | Ht. | Wt. | 40 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | DE | *Nick Bosa | Ohio State | 6-4 | 263 | 4.76 |
| 2 | DT | *Quinnen Williams | Alabama | 6-3 | 295 | 4.84 |
| 3 | DT | *Ed Oliver | Houston | 6-2 | 292 | 4.92 |
| 4 | DE | *Clelin Ferrell | Clemson | 6-4 | 265 | 4.78 |
| 5 | QB | *Dwayne Haskins Jr. | Ohio State | 6-2 | 220 | 4.59 |
| 6 | CB | *Greedy Williams | LSU | 6-2 | 185 | 4.50 |
| 7 | DE | *Rashan Gary | Michigan | 6-4 | 283 | 4.67 |
| 8 | OT | *Jonah Williams | Alabama | 6-5 | 301 | 5.02 |
| 9 | OLB | Josh Allen | Kentucky | 6-4 | 258 | 4.59 |
| 10 | ILB | *Devin White | LSU | 6-0 | 240 | 4.64 |
| 11 | CB | *Byron Murphy | Washington | 5-11 | 182 | 4.42 |
| 12 | DT | Christian Wilkins | Clemson | 6-3 | 315 | 5.04 |
| 13 | FS | *Deionte Thompson | Alabama | 6-1 | 196 | 4.50 |
| 14 | DT | *Jeffery Simmons | Mississippi State | 6-3 | 300 | 4.98 |
| 15 | DE | Montez Sweat | Mississippi State | 6-5 | 245 | 4.78 |
| 16 | QB | *Daniel Jones | Duke | 6-4 | 220 | 4.68 |
| 17 | QB | *Kyler Murray | Oklahoma | 5-10 | 195 | 4.40 |
| 18 | CB | Deandre Baker | Georgia | 5-11 | 185 | 4.49 |
| 19 | OT | *Greg Little | Mississippi | 6-5 | 325 | 5.23 |
| 20 | SS | *Taylor Rapp | Washington | 6-0 | 200 | 4.59 |
| 21 | WR | *Marquise Brown | Oklahoma | 5-10 | 168 | 4.34 |
| 22 | DT | *Dexter Lawrence | Clemson | 6-3 | 350 | 5.27 |
| 23 | DE | Zach Allen | Boston College | 6-5 | 285 | 4.92 |
| 24 | WR | *D.K. Metcalf | Mississippi | 6-3 | 230 | 4.58 |
| 25 | RB | *Josh Jacobs | Alabama | 5-09 | 216 | 4.49 |
| 26 | TE | *T.J. Hockenson | Iowa | 6-4 | 250 | 4.77 |
| 27 | FS | Nasir Adderley | Delaware | 5-11 | 200 | 4.50 |
| 28 | QB | Drew Lock | Missouri | 6-3 | 225 | 4.89 |
| 29 | WR | *N'Keal Harry | Arizona State | 6-3 | 213 | 4.52 |
| 30 | OLB | *Jachai Polite | Florida | 6-2 | 242 | 4.62 |
| 31 | OT | *Jawaan Taylor | Florida | 6-5 | 328 | 5.46 |
| 32 | WR | *A.J. Brown | Mississippi | 6-1 | 230 | 4.50 |
| 33 | OLB | *Brian Burns | Florida State | 6-4 | 235 | 4.64 |
| 34 | ILB | *Devin Bush | Michigan | 5-11 | 233 | 4.67 |
| 35 | DT | Jerry Tillery | Notre Dame | 6-6 | 305 | 5.32 |
| 36 | DE | Jaylon Ferguson | Louisiana Tech | 6-4 | 262 | 4.79 |
| 37 | CB | Amani Oruwariye | Penn State | 6-0 | 203 | 4.57 |
| 38 | OG | *Cody Ford | Oklahoma | 6-3 | 338 | 5.48 |
| 39 | DT | Dre'Mont Jones | Ohio State | 6-2 | 286 | 4.96 |
| 40 | WR | *Kelvin Harmon | NC State | 6-2 | 214 | 4.54 |
| 41 | C | Garrett Bradbury | NC State | 6-2 | 300 | 5.26 |
| 42 | C | Dalton Risner | Kansas State | 6-4 | 308 | 5.08 |
| 43 | WR | Parris Campbell | Ohio State | 6-0 | 208 | 4.39 |
| 44 | OT | Kaleb McGary | Washington | 6-7 | 324 | 5.27 |
| 45 | ILB | *Mack Wilson | Alabama | 6-1 | 239 | 4.73 |
| 46 | TE | *Irv Smith Jr. | Alabama | 6-3 | 241 | 4.66 |
| 47 | OG | Chris Lindstrom | Boston College | 6-3 | 310 | 5.28 |
| 48 | S | *Chauncey Gardner-Johnson | Florida | 6-0 | 208 | 4.52 |
| 49 | SS | *Amani Hooker | Iowa | 5-11 | 210 | 4.58 |
| 50 | CB | *Trayvon Mullen | Clemson | 6-1 | 195 | 4.49 |
| 51 | OT | *Bobby Evans | Oklahoma | 6-4 | 301 | 5.04 |
| 52 | C | Elgton Jenkins | Mississippi State | 6-4 | 310 | 5.34 |
| 53 | CB | Rock Ya-Sin | Temple | 6-1 | 190 | 4.60 |
| 54 | WR | *JJ Arcega-Whiteside | Stanford | 6-2 | 225 | 4.59 |
| 55 | RB | *Trayveon Williams | Texas A&M | 5-9 | 200 | 4.44 |
| 56 | DE | Oshane Ximines | Old Dominion | 6-4 | 255 | 4.84 |
| 57 | OT | *David Edwards | Wisconsin | 6-6 | 315 | 5.17 |
| 58 | TE | *Noah Fant | Iowa | 6-4 | 241 | 4.78 |
| 59 | DT | Isaiah Buggs | Alabama | 6-3 | 295 | 5.00 |
| 60 | WR | Deebo Samuel | South Carolina | 5-11 | 210 | 4.50 |
| 61 | OT | Andre Dillard | Washington State | 6-5 | 310 | 5.23 |
| 62 | OT | Yodny Cajuste | West Virginia | 6-5 | 321 | 5.20 |
| 63 | DT | Gerald Willis III | Miami | 6-3 | 300 | 4.94 |
| 64 | QB | Will Grier | West Virginia | 6-1 | 223 | 4.62 |
| 65 | CB | *Julian Love | Notre Dame | 5-11 | 193 | 4.50 |
| 66 | OG | Michael Deiter | Wisconsin | 6-5 | 310 | 5.36 |
| 67 | RB | Damien Harris | Alabama | 5-10 | 215 | 4.55 |
| 68 | DE | *Joe Jackson | Miami | 6-5 | 265 | 4.83 |
| 69 | DE | *Anthony Nelson | Iowa | 6-6 | 271 | 4.84 |
| 70 | CB | *Saivion Smith | Alabama | 6-1 | 200 | 4.52 |
| 71 | OLB | *Vosean Joseph | Florida | 6-0 | 226 | 4.58 |
| 72 | RB | *Benny Snell Jr. | Kentucky | 5-10 | 223 | 4.55 |
| 73 | SS | Johnathan Abram | Mississippi State | 5-11 | 215 | 4.57 |
| 74 | CB | *Kendall Sheffield | Ohio State | 5-11 | 193 | 4.47 |
| 75 | CB | Lonnie Johnson Jr. | Kentucky | 6-2 | 206 | 4.63 |
| 76 | QB | *Jarrett Stidham | Auburn | 6-2 | 215 | 4.92 |
| 77 | OLB | D'Andre Walker | Georgia | 6-2 | 245 | 4.70 |
| 78 | DE | Austin Bryant | Clemson | 6-5 | 280 | 4.83 |
| 79 | CB | Darnell Savage Jr. | Maryland | 5-11 | 200 | 4.57 |
| 80 | OG | *Michael Jordan | Ohio State | 6-6 | 312 | 5.24 |
| 81 | WR | *Lil'Jordan Humphrey | Texas | 6-4 | 225 | 4.50 |
| 82 | TE | *Kaden Smith | Stanford | 6-4 | 252 | 4.83 |
| 83 | DT | Kingsley Keke | Texas A&M | 6-3 | 305 | 5.23 |
| 84 | SS | Jaquan Johnson | Miami | 5-11 | 195 | 4.46 |
| 85 | OG | *Connor McGovern | Penn State | 6-4 | 323 | 5.19 |
| 86 | RB | *Darrell Henderson | Memphis | 5-09 | 200 | 4.55 |
| 87 | ILB | *Tre Lamar | Clemson | 6-2 | 255 | 4.72 |
| 88 | WR | *Riley Ridley | Georgia | 6-1 | 200 | 4.48 |
| 89 | OLB | Germaine Pratt | NC State | 6-2 | 240 | 4.68 |
| 90 | C | *Erik McCoy | Texas A&M | 6-3 | 315 | 5.36 |
| 91 | RB | Devin Singletary | FAU | 5-9 | 200 | 4.52 |
| 92 | TE | *Caleb Wilson | UCLA | 6-4 | 235 | 4.64 |
| 93 | WR | *Hakeem Butler | Iowa State | 6-5 | 225 | 4.59 |
| 94 | DT | Khalen Saunders | Western Illinois | 6-1 | 300 | 5.12 |
| 95 | DE | Chase Winovich | Michigan | 6-3 | 255 | 4.82 |
| 96 | OLB | Drue Tranquill | Notre Dame | 6-1 | 235 | 4.64 |
| 97 | DE | Charles Omenihu | Texas | 6-6 | 274 | 4.80 |
| 98 | FS | Marvell Tell III | USC | 6-2 | 195 | 4.52 |
| 99 | RB | *David Montgomery | Iowa State | 5-10 | 216 | 4.63 |
| 100 | OLB | *Sutton Smith | Northern Illinois | 6-0 | 237 | 4.74 |

*Rankings based on consensus opinion of NFLDraftScout.com analysts*

**Underclassman*

# SCOPING | THE DRAFT

## RANG'S BIG BOARD

BY ROB RANG, SENIOR ANALYST NFLDRAFTSCOUT.COM

A record haul of underclassmen significantly boosted the talent in the 2019 draft, with scouts especially excited about bumper crops along the defensive line and defensive backfield, as well as pass-catchers and offensive tackles.

Much of the focus, as always, will end up on the quarterbacks, but this year's class pales in comparison to a 2018 group that produced five first-round selections — the most this century. The cupboard is even more bare at running back, with just one player listed below.

The Big Board is not a mock draft. No attention is paid to team needs. This is simply my personal ranking of the top 32 NFL prospects available for the 2019 NFL Draft.

**1. Nick Bosa, DE, Ohio State*:**
One shouldn't blame Big Ten tackles or NFL scouts for confusing Nick with his older brother Joey. While perhaps slightly shorter than Joey, Nick offers a similar blend of power, technique, functional athleticism and instincts, making him arguably the safest NFL prospect in the country and a reasonable bet to exceed his brother's No. 3 overall selection two years ago.

**2. Quinnen Williams, DT, Alabama*:**
Williams was the most dominant player in college football in 2019, exhibiting a combination of raw power and quickness that I haven't seen from an interior defensive lineman since Nebraska star Ndamukong Suh went No. 2 overall (to Detroit) nearly a decade ago.

**3. Ed Oliver, DT, Houston*:**
His ability to penetrate from the interior makes him a difference-maker against the pass and run — a rarity among interior defensive linemen. Oliver reminds me of two-time reigning NFL Defensive Player of the Year Aaron Donald, who also faced questions about where exactly he fit along an NFL line after dominating at Pitt.

**4. Clelin Ferrell, DE, Clemson*:**
Bosa, Williams and Oliver have earned most of the buzz (and for good reason), but Ferrell is essentially 1D on my board as the best combination of size, athleticism and consistency. Although he won't turn 22 until May, Ferrell already shows impressive strength, ripping free from pass blockers and re-setting the line of scrimmage in the run game to go along with the burst and bend to take the edge.

**5. Andraez "Greedy" Williams, CB, LSU*:**
No program in the country has a more impressive track record when it comes to producing NFL defensive backs than LSU, and insiders there suggest Williams may be the best out of Baton Rouge since Patrick Peterson. I wish Williams was more physical, but he offers exceptional length, agility and ball skills.

**6. Rashan Gary, DE, Michigan*:**
While perhaps lacking the elite burst of this year's top pass rushers, Gary can effectively harass the quarterback because of his prototypical blend of size, strength, awareness and refined technique — traits that allowed Michigan to slide him up and down the defensive line.

**7. Byron Murphy, CB, Washington*:**
Boasting an almost unfair combination of agility, ball skills and physicality that compares favorably to top-drafted cornerbacks Marshon Lattimore and Denzel Ward the past two years, Murphy ranks as one of the elite prospects of the draft despite reportedly earning just a second-round grade from the NFL Advisory Committee. We disagree. Murphy has a better chance at becoming the first defensive back off the board than slipping out of the top 32.

**8. Jonah Williams, OT, Alabama*:**
Like his predecessor, Cam Robinson (now the Jaguars' starting left tackle), Williams possesses the skills to remain a blind-side protector in the NFL. While not quite as large as Robinson, Williams is a smoother athlete and does not come with the off-field concerns that pushed Robinson just outside the first round two years ago.

**9. Josh Allen, OLB/DE, Kentucky:**
Allen emerged as an elite player last season, taking home a closet-full of awards, including the Nagurski as the nation's top defender. Long and slippery with explosive closing speed, Allen is a threat to wreak havoc on every snap and offers intriguing schematic and positional versatility.

**10. Christian Wilkins, DT, Clemson:**
Wilkins was a difference-maker at Clemson no matter where he lined up, showing shocking agility and energy for a man of his size and seeing time at defensive tackle, defensive end and even fullback. Clemson coaches rave about Wilkins' selflessness and leadership. I'm also intrigued by his awareness, as his 15 career passes defended is a very high number for a 300-pounder.

**11. Dwayne Haskins, QB, Ohio State*:**
Unlike most quarterbacks who starred under Urban Meyer, Haskins is a classic drop-back passer. He shows good accuracy to all levels of the field, plenty of arm strength and poise in pressure situations — which is the biggest factor why he checks in as my top-rated quarterback.

**12. Jeffery Simmons, DT, Miss. State*:**
An easy mover with grown-man strength, Simmons would compete for top billing among defensive linemen in most drafts. He compares favorably to former MSU star interior defensive linemen Fletcher Cox (Philadelphia) and Chris Jones (Kansas City), who have since emerged as two of the best in the NFL.

**13. Deionte Thompson, FS, Alabama*:**
Thompson possesses all of the traits scouts look for in a modern safety, including the range to cover sideline to sideline, the ball skills to punish quarterbacks who challenge him and reliable open-field tackling.

**14. Montez Sweat, DE/OLB, Miss. State:**
With his rare length and massive 84.5-inch wingspan, Sweat casts an imposing shadow off the edge. After making 22.5 sacks and 30 tackles for loss in the past two seasons, he competed at the Senior Bowl, where he confirmed his top 15 standing in the draft.

**15. Devin White, ILB, LSU*:**
A battering ram with impressive closing speed and excellent strength to wrestle ball-carriers to the ground, White worked hard last season to prove he is a full-service linebacker, recording a career-high six passes defended.

**16. D.K. Metcalf, WR, Mississippi*:**
In terms of upside, Metcalf is the most intriguing receiver in the draft, boasting a prototypical combination of size, speed and leaping ability. Teams have gambled and lost big on injury-prone receivers in the first round in recent years and, unfortunately, Metcalf comes with medical concerns, including a neck surgery that limited him to just seven games in 2018.

**17. Deandre Baker, CB, Georgia*:**
The 2018 Jim Thorpe Award winner as the nation's top defensive back, Baker isn't the biggest or fastest, but the three-year starter has been forged by fire, showing the mental and physical toughness to succeed in coverage and run support in the NFL.

**18. T.J. Hockenson, TE, Iowa*:**
He and fellow Iowa pass-catcher Noah Fant split production in 2018, with neither generating the kind of numbers to earn lavish praise. Hockenson's frame, soft hands

and stellar blocking, however, suggest that he could follow in the footsteps of another former Iowa tight end — George Kittle — in saving his best play for the pro level.

**19. Kyler Murray, QB, Oklahoma*:**
What he has already accomplished — winning the Heisman Trophy in his only season as a starting quarterback and being selected No. 9 overall in the 2018 Major League Baseball draft — already suggest he is among the world's best all-around athletes. Projecting him as an NFL franchise passer is more difficult, but his passing accuracy looks legit.

**20. Greg Little, OT, Mississippi*:**
Little is considerably less polished than Alabama's Jonah Williams (eighth on my board), but that isn't surprising given that he has just two seasons as a full-time starter. Little's rock-solid bulk gives his future NFL team the option to slide him inside early in his career to help him acclimate, just as the Miami Dolphins did with his predecessor, Laremy Tunsil.

**21. Dexter Lawrence, NT, Clemson*:**
Traditional run-stuffers like Lawrence do not hold the same value they once did. The NFL remains a big man's game, however, and few boast Lawrence's combination of size, power and athleticism. I do not anticipate Lawrence's draft stock being significantly affected by his well-documented positive test for a performance-enhancing substance.

**22. Josh Jacobs, RB, Alabama*:**
An explosive, powerful back with a wicked jump-cut and terrific burst, Jacobs is the only runner to crack my Big Board, earning this distinction despite serving as a backup virtually his entire college career. Jacobs epitomizes the expression "running angry" and has plenty of tread left on his tires despite leaving some prints on the chests of would-be tacklers the past three seasons.

**23. Nasir Adderley, S, Delaware:**
Having scouted the Senior Bowl since 2001, I've learned patience when evaluating small-school prospects until getting a chance to check them out against elite competition. It is rare that a small-school prospect shines the way Adderley did on the big stage at the Senior Bowl, showcasing the range, instincts and ball skills to project as an immediate starter at free safety.

**24. N'Keal Harry, WR, Arizona State*:**
Perhaps due to how he was used early in his career, Harry developed a reputation as more of a possession receiver than a true, all-around No. 1 type. In 2018, however, Harry showed improved agility to make defenders miss in tight quarters; he had a dazzling punt return against USC that showed off his underrated agility and speed.

**25. Taylor Rapp, SS, Washington*:**
Rapp excels in two areas absolutely critical to success in the NFL at this position: producing turnovers and tackling in the open field. In a draft blessed with a lot of talented defensive backs, Rapp might offer the highest floor.

**26. Jawaan Taylor, OT, Florida*:**
Teams looking for a dominant run-blocking right tackle will certainly be intrigued by the massive Taylor, a three-year starter with experience playing both sides. Taylor is surprisingly light on his feet for his size and uses his long arms to push pass-rushers out wide. He's a monster in the running game.

**27. Jerry Tillery, DL, Notre Dame:**
As physically imposing as it gets for defensive linemen, this long-armed Louisiana native wins with a combination of size, power and tenacity similar to former Notre Dame (and current Pittsburgh Steelers) standout Stephon Tuitt. Tillery's size and power is certain to draw the interest of 4-3 and 3-4 disciples.

**28. A.J. Brown, WR, Mississippi*:**
While speed is the trait most look for at wide receiver, I'm also a big believer in competitiveness, which has helped some NFL receivers who didn't run so well for the stopwatch enjoy plenty of success. This is where Brown (like Keenan Allen and Anquan Boldin before him) excels, using his frame and physicality to badger smaller cornerbacks or when generating yards after the catch.

**29. Dalton Risner, OL, Kansas State:**
Along with Adderley (ranked 23rd) no player on my board boosted his stock more at the Senior Bowl than Risner. Quick and alert enough to project as a starting interior lineman should his future NFL team need it, Risner starred at right tackle in Mobile, schooling the best edge rushers the game had to offer.

**30. Drew Lock, QB, Missouri:**
When he feels comfortable in the pocket, Lock's accuracy and competitive fire is undeniable, though his play can get frenetic when he's taken some hits. It is a skill-set that reminds me a bit of current Oakland Raiders standout Derek Carr.

**31. Cody Ford, OL, Oklahoma*:**
Ford's below-average listed height suggests he might be best served moving from right tackle back inside to guard, where he started in 2016-17. Regardless, Ford's combination of agility and power deserve first-round consideration.

**32. Amani Hooker, S, Iowa*:**
Hooker emerged from the shadows in 2018 to earn Big Ten Defensive Back of the Year accolades, showing the ball skills that helped former teammates Desmond King and Josh Jackson succeed in the NFL, as well as breath-taking closing speed.

***Underclassman**

## ALL-STAR STANDOUTS

Take it from last year's postseason all-star game risers like Baker Mayfield (No. 1, Oklahoma), Josh Allen (No. 7, Wyoming) and Darius Leonard (No. 36, South Carolina State) — big-time play on those marquee stages matter on draft day.

Here are the players who might benefit from their strong showings at college all-star festivities in 2019:

**1. Dalton Risner, OL, Kansas State:**
Risner may have been the most impressive player at the 2019 Senior Bowl, wowing scouts with his underrated athleticism, toughness, technique and competitiveness.

**2. Penny Hart, WR, Georgia State:**
The NFL loves elusive and speedy receivers, and Hart shined in Mobile, demonstrating the big-play ability every team wants to add to the roster.

**3. Lonnie Johnson Jr., CB, Kentucky:**
The Senior Bowl was crawling with long-armed cornerbacks this year, but none was more impressive than Johnson, who may have sealed up a top 64 selection with his stellar week of practice.

**4. Daylon Mack, DT, Texas A&M:**
Overshadowed throughout much of his career with the Aggies, Mack delivered at the East-West Shrine Game and Senior Bowl, turning heads with his square frame, raw power and surprising quickness.

**5. Jimmy Moreland, CB, James Madison:**
Like Mack, Moreland received the cherished call-up to Mobile after a stellar week at the East-West, impressing with his confidence, quickness in coverage and underrated physicality.

Dalton Risner, Kansas State
PHOTO BY MICHAEL C. JOHNSON-USA TODAY SPORTS

# CRYSTAL BALL

## FIRST LOOK AT THE 2020 DRAFT

### Seniors

***1. Justin Herbert, QB, Oregon:***
A more gifted prospect than any of the QBs in the 2019 draft, Herbert enters his final season as the odds-on-favorite to be the first senior selected in 2020.

***2. Derrick Brown, DT, Auburn:***
Likely a first-round pick had he entered the 2019 draft, Brown delivers with raw power and underrated athleticism.

***3. Raekwon Davis, DE, Alabama:***
The imposing 6-6, 300-pound Davis led the Tide in sacks in 2017 and could re-emerge as an early first-round prospect in 2019.

***4. Brandon Jones, S, Texas:*** The once-proud Texas secondary looks to be back with Jones, whose instincts and physicality could have made him a top 50 candidate in 2019.

***5. Prince Tega Wanogho, OT, Auburn:***
Still a work in progress from a technique standpoint but Wanogho's rare athleticism is obvious on tape.

***6. Bryce Hall, CB, Virginia:***
Hall led the country with 24 passes broken up in 2018. If he can turn more of them into interceptions, he has a chance to jump into the top 50 mix next spring.

***7. Trey Adams, OT, Washington:***
Viewed as a potential 2019 first-round pick at this time last year, Adams needs to prove he is recovered from the back surgery that dogged his fourth season at UW.

***8. Calvin Throckmorton, OT, Oregon:***
A proven starter at the left and right tackle positions, Throckmorton earns top marks for versatility and dependability.

***9. Rashard Lawrence, DT, LSU:***
It is easy to be reminded of former LSU legend Glenn Dorsey when watching the powerful (if somewhat undersized) Lawrence eat up blockers on his way to the ball.

***10. Collin Johnson, WR, Texas:***
Speaking of current stars reminding of legends ... has anyone seen Roy Williams and Johnson in the same room?

### Underclassmen

***1. Tua Tagovailoa, QB, Alabama:***
While not as athletic, the comparisons to Steve Young aren't far off, given this southpaw's size and accuracy from the pocket.

***2. Chase Young, DE, Ohio State:***
Every team should be as fortunate as the Buckeyes, replacing one top five pick (Nick Bosa) with another in Young, who starred against Washington's NFL-caliber OTs in the Rose Bowl.

***3. Grant Delpit, S, LSU:***
While not yet reaching his former teammate's notoriety, Delpit may have been selected higher than Greedy Williams if eligible for the 2019 draft.

***4. Isaiah Simmons, OLB, Clemson:***
A former safety who has grown into a mobile monster at linebacker, Simmons has the look of a future top 10 pick.

***5. Travis Etienne, RB, Clemson:***
The 2020 NFL Draft is likely to be loaded again at running back. Etienne has a different level of speed than most of his peers.

***6. Jerry Jeudy, WR, Alabama:***
A fluid accelerator with a flair for the dramatic, it is easy to recall former Biletnikoff Award winner Amari Cooper in crimson when watching Jeudy.

***7. Laviska Shenault, WR, Colorado:***
A one-man wrecking crew for the Buffaloes, Shenault should see even greater production in 2019 with many of the Pac-12's top DBs leaving (and his strong-armed QB Steven Montez returning as a senior).

***8. Albert Okwuegbunam, TE, Missouri:***
Most of the top tight ends are headed for the 2019 draft, but not Okwuegbunam, who covers 20 yards before most defenders can spit out his name.

***9. Cam Akers, RB, Florida State:***
Nobody has to look hard for the second coming of Dalvin Cook, with the similarly-built and talented Akers also starring for the Seminoles.

***10. Walker Little, OT, Stanford:***
Few churn out quality offensive linemen like the Cardinal. Little is already that, boasting an NFL-like frame at 6-7, 305 pounds.

***Visit NFLDraftScout.com for news and rankings updated daily year-round.***

## 'TWEENERS

**1. Ed Oliver, DL/LB, Houston:**
The Cougars put Oliver at nose guard because they wanted his exceptional quickness as close to the ball as possible. That strategy may not hold up in the NFL with some calling for Oliver to make the switch to linebacker if he weighs in under 275 pounds.

**2. Hakeem Butler, WR/TE, Iowa State:**
Defending the 6-5, 225-pound Butler is a tall order, but does Butler have the quickness on the outside to get open against cornerbacks?

**3. Jalen Hurd, RB/WR/TE, Baylor:**
Hurd starred as a running back at Tennessee and a receiver at Baylor, but, at nearly 6-5, 227 pounds, his future in the NFL may be at tight end.

**4. Oshane Ximines, DE/OLB, Old Dominion:**
Ximines dominated at defensive end in college but at just 245 pounds, he'll likely have to make the switch to stand-up linebacker in the NFL.

**5. Jalen Jelks, DE/OLB, Oregon:**
Jelks (6-5, 245) played both roles at Oregon, but he'll look like a Duck out of water attempting to cover NFL running backs while also lacking the anchor to hold up on the line of scrimmage.

## RED-FLAG

**1. Preston Williams, WR, Colorado State:**
Along with Mississippi State defensive tackle Jeffery Simmons, Williams was one of two players specifically not invited to the 2019 Combine because of a violent criminal charge in their past. Williams is a clearly gifted prospect, but he might need to make a strong impression with those who opt to attend his Pro Day just to assure being drafted.

**2. Dexter Lawrence, DT, Clemson:**
Lawrence comes with plenty of questions about his conditioning after playing much of his career at an estimated 350 pounds. The "bigger" concern, of course, is the positive test for a performance-enhancing substance (Ostarine) that got him suspended from Clemson's playoff games, including the national championship.

**3. Rodney Anderson, RB, Oklahoma:**
Anderson is undeniably gifted — standing out alongside future NFL runners Joe Mixon and Samaje Perine during their shared time at Oklahoma — but he's suffered three season-ending injuries — a broken leg (2015), fractured vertebrae in his neck (2016) and torn ACL last year.

**4. Gerald Willis, DT, Miami:**
Though he showed improved commitment in 2018, teams may need to vet Willis if considering drafting him to get a better feel for why he transferred from Florida as well as the "personal reasons" that led to him sitting out the 2017 season.

## SHOULD HAVE STAYED IN SCHOOL

**1. Tyree Jackson, QB, Buffalo:**
There is no denying Jackson's raw tools, and a flashy week at the Senior Bowl perhaps proves that his choice to leave Buffalo early was a good one. Jackson is sushi raw, however, and isn't likely to get the one-on-one time needed to develop while holding a clipboard in the NFL.

**2. Caleb Wilson, TE, UCLA:**
An average of 13 tight ends have been selected over each of the past three drafts, meaning some of the 12 underclassmen who opted to forgo their remaining eligibility this year are going to be disappointed. Wilson is a talented pass-catcher, but he lacks ideal size and could have been a featured part of Chip Kelly's wide-open offense next season for the Bruins.

**3. Dillon Mitchell, WR, Oregon:**
Given that he led the pass-happy Pac-12 in receiving yards (1,184), it is understandable why he opted to strike while the iron was hot, but with toolsy QB Justin Herbert returning to Oregon, Mitchell may have passed up a chance to boost his own numbers and draft stock.

**4. Trayvon Mullen, CB, Clemson:**
With Clemson's dominant defensive line heading for the NFL — and Mullen earning MVP honors of the national title game — it is easy to see why he left early. But don't be surprised if he slips on draft day, as the tape isn't always kind.

**5. Clifton Duck, CB, Appalachian State:**
Big plays against inferior competition won't earn Duck the top 100 pick he may have received next year with a solid performance in senior all-star games.

## GRADING GUIDE

Reader's guide to the grading scale in the position-by-position analysis. No 10.0s, you ask? There's no such thing as a flawless prospect.

**FUTURE POTENTIAL**

| | |
|---|---|
| 8.5-9.0 | Perennial All-Pro |
| 8.1-8.4 | Pro Bowl caliber |
| 7.1-8.0 | Above average starter |
| 6.1-7.0 | Solid starter |
| 5.1-6.0 | Key reserve |
| 4.6-5.0 | Just hanging on |
| 4-4.5 | Fringe prospect |

# 20/20

It takes longer than one season to fairly judge a draft — see our NFL team report section — but some hits and misses from last year's draft became evident as team needs arose during the regular season in 2018. Given a time machine, here's how the top 10 picks in the '18 draft would have shaken out if hindsight were in play:

| TEAM | DID SELECT | SHOULD HAVE SELECTED |
|---|---|---|

**1. Cleveland Browns** — QB Baker Mayfield — QB Baker Mayfield

It is hard to quibble with the Browns' choice of Mayfield. Not only did he break the rookie record with 27 touchdown passes, he was the main catalyst behind the team jumping from zero wins in 2017 to seven last year.

**2. New York Giants** — RB Saquon Barkley — QB Sam Darnold

Like the Browns a pick earlier, the Giants probably feel very good about their choice of Barkley, who was everything GM Dave Gettleman could have hoped, recording over 2,000 all-purpose yards and scoring 15 touchdowns as a rookie. That said, the clock is running on Eli Manning and there is not a QB available this offseason as gifted as Darnold.

**3. New York Jets** — QB Sam Darnold — DE/OLB Bradley Chubb

Unlike their cross-town rivals, the Jets now have their young franchise quarterback, but in this exercise, he's off the board. One can't help but wonder how many more victories the Jets might have had last year had they nabbed an immediate impact edge rusher like Chubb, who easily led all NFL rookies with 12 sacks.

**4. Cleveland Browns** — CB Denzel Ward — RB Saquon Barkley

Drafting a rookie Pro Bowl cornerback was a great way to reverse what had been a disappointing defense in Cleveland, but pairing Barkley with Mayfield would have been fun, as well.

**5. Denver Broncos** — DE/OLB Bradley Chubb — CB Denzel Ward

Let's face it, the rich got richer with the Broncos adding Chubb to pair with Von Miller, but the team's cornerback play certainly tailed off a year ago. With so many gifted edge rushers available in 2019, GM John Elway may have wished he and his staff had shown greater foresight and added a cornerback (or quarterback) with this pick.

**6. Indianapolis Colts** — OG Quenton Nelson — OLB Darius Leonard

The Colts, of course, got Nelson and Leonard in the real draft, which is among the reasons why the Pro Football Writers of America voted GM Chris Ballard as the Executive of the Year. One could make a strong argument that Nelson's physicality and toughness were critical to the Colts' return to the playoffs. Of course, just as strong an argument could be made for Leonard, who led the NFL in tackles as a rookie (163), while chipping in seven sacks, four forced fumbles and two interceptions.

**7. Buffalo Bills** — QB Josh Allen — OG Quenton Nelson

Allen certainly provided his share of highlights for the Bills, showing the grit and "wow" arm to invigorate a blue-collar Buffalo fan base and allow the club to focus on other, lesser needs in 2019. The Bills must find help along the offensive line if Allen is to live up to his potential and talents like Nelson — a rookie Pro Bowler — don't come around often.

**8. Chicago Bears** — ILB Roquan Smith — LB Leighton Vander Esch

It may be that Smith winds up developing into the superstar middle linebacker the Bears have been searching for since Brian Urlacher retired. Vander Esch, selected 11 picks later, provided that kind of impact immediately for the Cowboys.

**9. San Francisco 49ers** — OT Mike McGlinchey — S Derwin James

Needing to add size and toughness to their offensive line, you won't hear many knowledgeable 49ers fans complaining about McGlinchey after he started all 16 games at right tackle as a rookie. That said, no offensive lineman is likely to move the needle the way a playmaking defender like James did for the Chargers this year.

**10. Arizona Cardinals** — QB Josh Rosen — DE Marcus Davenport

It may be that the Cardinals would choose Rosen again now as the talented passer looks like an ideal fit in new head coach Kliff Kingsbury's offense. In hindsight though, one has to wonder if then-Arizona head coach Steve Wilks might have preferred a toolsy pass rusher like Davenport to help build a winning culture.

# 2019 MOCK DRAFT

**BY RIC SERRITELLA • SENIOR ANALYST**

**NFLDRAFTSCOUT.COM**

If 2018 was the year of the quarterback, then 2019 is the year of the defensive lineman. Expect a flurry of big boys up front to be selected early and often, with nearly a dozen projected in this mock to be taken in the first round.

It's an explosive group with an abundance of talent, including Nick Bosa of Ohio State. Many evaluators feel he is a better prospect than his brother Joey, who has totaled 28.5 sacks through his first 35 games in the NFL. Like his brother, Nick comes with concerns about his durability.

More defensive linemen — notably Houston's Ed Oliver and Michigan's Rashan Gary — were once thought to be in the mix for the No. 1 overall selection. However, it was Quinnen Williams of Alabama who soared up draft boards throughout the season, putting his name among the first-pick possibilities.

Defensive tackle is the deepest position in the 2019 class, with prospects such as Williams, Oliver, the dynamic duo of Christian Wilkins and Dexter Lawrence from Clemson, Mississippi State's talented Jeffery Simmons ... and, well, lots more.

There are several top-shelf hand-in-the-dirt 4-3 edge-rushers in this year's draft as well, including Simmons' teammate Montez Sweat, who dominated the Senior Bowl, along with Brian Burns of Florida State and Jachai Polite from Florida. Smaller-school standouts such as Jaylon Ferguson of Louisiana Tech and Oshane Ximines of Old Dominion add to the impressive depth at defensive end.

All in all, it's a good year to be an NFL team in need of a defensive lineman ... or three.

(Remember, these are my personal picks and might not line up with the consensus projections elsewhere in the magazine.)

**NICK BOSA**

Photo by Matthew Emmons-USA TODAY Sports

## 1. ARIZONA
### NICK BOSA
**DE, OHIO STATE**

New head coach Kliff Kingsbury should have a strong grasp of the offense, and Bosa would provide him with a blue-chip player to build the defense around.

## 2. SAN FRANCISCO
### JOSH ALLEN
**OLB, KENTUCKY**

If Allen joins a beefy defensive front in San Francisco, he could take advantage of some one-on-ones as an outside pass-rusher.

## 3. NEW YORK JETS
### QUINNEN WILLIAMS
**DT, ALABAMA**

New defensive coordinator Gregg Williams will be transitioning to a 4-3 front, and Williams has the perfect explosion for the interior of that scheme.

## 4. OAKLAND
### ED OLIVER
**DT, HOUSTON**

Oliver, quick and aggressive, fits the Raiders profile with a feisty demeanor, to go along with outstanding lateral speed.

## 5. TAMPA BAY
### CLELIN FERRELL
**DE, CLEMSON**

Lining up Ferrell opposite of Jason Pierre-Paul would allow him to have the same kind of impact on the edge he made while at Clemson.

## 6. NEW YORK GIANTS
### RASHAN GARY
**DE, MICHIGAN**

Not only would Gary provide a much-needed presence on the defensive front but selecting the local New Jersey product would help fire up the fan base.

## 7. JACKSONVILLE
### DWAYNE HASKINS
**QB, OHIO STATE**

The Blake Bortles experiment has officially ended in Jacksonville, and Haskins has flashed all the tools necessary to become the heir apparent.

## 8. DETROIT
### T.J. HOCKENSON
**TE, IOWA**

Its been five years since the Lions last used a first-round pick on a tight end; Eric Ebron has since moved on to Indianapolis, and the current regime in Detroit values strong tight-end play.

## 9. BUFFALO
### MARQUISE BROWN
**WR, OKLAHOMA**

After watching Patrick Mahomes chuck up so many deep balls to Tyreek Hill in Kansas City, one can only wonder what type of production a Josh Allen-to-Brown connection could generate.

## 10. DENVER
### DREW LOCK
**QB, MISSOURI**

Possibly the worst-kept secret in the draft is general manager John Elway's man-crush on Lock, whom he scouted during the season and stalked at the Senior Bowl.

## 11. CINCINNATI
### GREEDY WILLIAMS
**CB, LSU**

The Bengals gave up more passing yards than any team in the league last season, so the selection of Williams would help extinguish some of the fires in the secondary.

## 12. GREEN BAY
### DEVIN WHITE
**ILB, LSU**

One reason for Green Bay's recent struggles has been its inability to find suitable replacements at linebacker; White gives them a new leader in the middle.

## 13. MIAMI
### KYLER MURRAY
**QB, OKLAHOMA**

It sounds like it could be the name of a new sitcom but "Murray in Miami" would be the hottest player to hit the city since LeBron decided to take his talents to South Beach.

## 14. ATLANTA
### CHRISTIAN WILKINS
**DT, CLEMSON**

Envisioning Wilkins lining up between Tak McKinley and Vic Beasley would make head coach Dan Quinn sleep much better at night.

## 15. WASHINGTON
### DANIEL JONES
**QB, DUKE**

Washington must begin the process of moving on from Alex Smith; Jones possesses the smarts to grasp Jay Gruden's complex offense.

## 16. CAROLINA
### JONAH WILLIAMS
**OT, ALABAMA**

Protecting Cam Newton has to be a main priority during the offseason, and Williams is an instant upgrade on the offensive line.

## 17. CLEVELAND
### JEFFERY SIMMONS
**DT, MISSISSIPPI STATE**

Browns general manager John Dorsey had no qualms selecting Tyreek Hill during his time with the Chiefs and would be willing to roll the dice on Simmons.

## 18. MINNESOTA
### DARNELL SAVAGE, JR.
**DB, MARYLAND**

Adding the speedy and versatile Savage to the secondary will allow the Vikings tremendous flexibility with his ability to also play nickel.

## 19. TENNESSEE
### MACK WILSON
**ILB, ALABAMA**

The Crimson Tide product possesses a prototypical frame for the NFL and would help erase some of the issues up the middle on defense.

## 20. PITTSBURGH
### D.K. METCALF
**WR, MISSISSIPPI**

While JuJu Smith-Schuster emerged as a star, the Steelers have very little depth behind their current starters.

## 21. SEATTLE
### MONTEZ SWEAT
**DE, MISSISSIPPI STATE**

Injecting Sweat into the Seahawks' defensive front rotation would add an extra level of viciousness and create mismatch nightmares.

## 22. BALTIMORE
### N'KEAL HARRY
**WR, ARIZONA STATE**

As the Lamar Jackson Era rolls on, he's going to need some additional big-play weapons to help his development; Harry could emerge into the WR1 the Ravens so desperately need.

## 23. HOUSTON
### GREG LITTLE
**OT, MISSISSIPPI**

It would appear that Little could challenge Julien Davenport for the starting left tackle in Houston or serve as a solid

addition on the right side; the two could serve as interchangeable parts.

**24. OAKLAND** (via Chicago)
**BYRON MURPHY**
**CB, WASHINGTON**

A strong cover corner capable of lining up inside, outside or any side of the field, Murphy has huge upside. A handful of teams view him as the top corner in this year's class.

**25. PHILADELPHIA**
**JOSH JACOBS**
**RB, ALABAMA**

The Eagles have continuously attempted to shore up the running back position; Jacobs solves this problem and could feed off the stable of backs much like he did with the Crimson Tide.

**26. INDIANAPOLIS**
**A.J. BROWN**
**WR, MISSISSIPPI**

Nobody accomplished more with less than Andrew Luck last season; he might as well be wearing a "Help Wanted" sign around his neck.

**27. OAKLAND** (via Dallas)
**DEANDRE BAKER**
**CB, GEORGIA**

Rarely does opportunity present itself to nab two top-tier cornerbacks in the same draft, but Oakland is in a unique position to do just that.

**28. LOS ANGELES CHARGERS**
**ANDRE DILLARD**
**OT, WASHINGTON STATE**

Keeping Philip Rivers upright is vital, and Dillard seemed up to the task at the Senior Bowl with an eye-raising performance that caught the attention of NFL scouts.

**29. KANSAS CITY**
**BRIAN BURNS**
**DE, FLORIDA STATE**

He could thrive as a pass rusher under new defensive coordinator Steve Spagnuolo with his size, speed and athleticism.

**30. GREEN BAY** (via New Orleans)
**KELVIN HARMON**
**WR, NC STATE**

With the innovative offensive scheme expected to be installed by new head coach Matt LaFleur, plus Aaron Rodgers throwing him the ball, this could be a match made in heaven.

**31. LOS ANGELES RAMS**
**DEXTER LAWRENCE**
**DT, CLEMSON**

A cost-effective plug on defense who can sustain a high level of play, Lawrence could help replicate some of the stout play on the interior that benefitted the Rams during their Super Bowl run.

**32. NEW ENGLAND**
**JACHAI POLITE**
**DE, FLORIDA**

No Patriots player had more than 7.5 sacks last season; Polite would be a welcome addition as a disruptive edge force.

## SECOND ROUND

JAWAAN TAYLOR
Photo by Kim Klement-USA TODAY Sports

**33. ARIZONA**
**JAWAAN TAYLOR**
**OT, FLORIDA**

An anchor on the offensive line to complement the Cardinals' young franchise quarterback; if Josh Rosen is to succeed, he's going to need more time to throw.

**34. INDIANAPOLIS** (via New York Jets)
**LONNIE JOHNSON**
**CB, KENTUCKY**

A lengthy, fast, physical corner who can strengthen the Colts defense, Johnson shows excellent recovery speed and can also help out against the run.

**35. OAKLAND**
**JOHNATHAN ABRAM**
**FS, MISSISSIPPI STATE**

Jon Gruden finally gets the safety he wanted in a total remake of the secondary; remember his Bucs defense featured a loaded group of defensive backs.

**36. SAN FRANCISCO**
**DEEBO SAMUEL**
**WR, SOUTH CAROLINA**

Sharp route-running and dependable hands would be a great asset for Jimmy Garoppolo; more ammunition needed by the Bay.

**37. NEW YORK GIANTS**
**GARRETT BRADBURY**
**C, NC STATE**

Offensive line has been the Giants' weakest link for a long time now and the center spot has been a revolving door; Bradbury would be a huge stabilizer.

**38. JACKSONVILLE**
**CODY FORD**
**OL, OKLAHOMA**

The versatile Ford has the tools to compete at tackle but could also make a suitable guard. Whoever is taking snaps behind center for Jacksonville would benefit from better line play.

**39. TAMPA BAY**
**DEVIN SINGLETARY**
**RB, FAU**

Look for Bruce Arians to push for offensive playmakers during the draft weekend. Singletary removes the current question mark that surrounds the backfield.

**40. BUFFALO**
**CHRIS LINDSTROM**
**OG, BOSTON COLLEGE**

Nastier than Brian Knobbs in the trenches, Lindstrom brings the key elements of toughness and durability to the offensive line.

**41. DENVER**
**ELGTON JENKINS**
**C, MISSISSIPPI STATE**

After nabbing a new quarterback, Denver lands a new man in the middle

to snap it to him for what they hope will be the next decade or so.

**42. CINCINNATI**
**WILL GRIER**
**QB, WEST VIRGINIA**
A contingency plan should be in place if Andy Dalton continues to falter, and Grier would benefit from not having to play right away.

**43. DETROIT**
**TRAYVON MULLEN**
**CB, CLEMSON**
The Lions are in need of help at the corner spot, and Mullen brings a great size/speed combo to help provide some stability.

**44. GREEN BAY**
**DEIONTE THOMPSON**
**FS, ALABAMA**
Thompson, a rangy safety who could help play up in the box and serve as a valuable addition, is one of the missing ingredients lacking from the Packers defense.

**45. ATLANTA**
**ROCK YA-SIN**
**CB, TEMPLE**
With his combination of size and athleticism, Ya-Sin shows the potential to be a CB1 at the next level with his lockdown tendencies and physical play.

**46. WASHINGTON**
**PARRIS CAMPBELL**
**WR, OHIO STATE**
After finding a new quarterback, the next item on the agenda should be to provide him with a new toy. Campbell can blow the top off any defense.

**47. CAROLINA**
**JAYLON FERGUSON**
**DE, LOUISIANA TECH**
The Panthers have gotten away from their pass-rushing identity they used to be known for; Ferguson would help change that in an instant.

**48. MIAMI**
**DRU SAMIA**
**OG, OKLAHOMA**
A big, physical and agile pile-mover, Samia would fit the style of play that new head coach Brian Flores would like to implement, while boosting the run game immediately.

**49. CLEVELAND**
**DEVIN BUSH**
**ILB, MICHIGAN**
Another tough, hard-nosed defensive piece to help strengthen the Browns identity and take the team a step closer to being a playoff contender.

**50. MINNESOTA**
**JERRY TILLERY**
**DT, NOTRE DAME**
Would fit in perfect to the scheme and help shore up a need; Tillery not only eats up space and opens up pass-rush lanes, he flashes the ability to get after the quarterback himself.

**51. TENNESSEE**
**OSHANE XIMINES**
**DE, OLD DOMINION**
The Titans sorely lack a consistent pass-rusher on defense and Ximines possesses the skill-set to develop into that role at the next level.

**52. PITTSBURGH**
**TRE LAMAR**
**ILB, CLEMSON**
The Steelers have solidified their outside linebacker corps; now its time to match talent on the inside. Lamar would be the closest they've come to trying to replace Ryan Shazier.

**53. PHILADELPHIA**
(via Baltimore)
**JOEJUAN WILLIAMS**
**CB, VANDERBILT**
A thin secondary was apparent down the stretch of last season; Williams is long, quick and possesses strong one-on-one coverage. The Eagles need all of that.

**54. HOUSTON**
(via Seattle)
**IRV SMITH, JR.**
**TE, ALABAMA**
Adding a playmaking tight end would allow Bill O'Brien to open up the offense some for Deshaun Watson. Smith would serve as a perfect complement underneath to the dangerous DeAndre Hopkins.

**55. HOUSTON**
**JOHN COMINSKY**
**DE, CHARLESTON (WV)**
Projects as a great fit to anchor down one side of the Titans' 3-4 defensive scheme; Cominsky can play contain end or get after the quarterback if needed.

**56. NEW ENGLAND**
(via Chicago)
**JULIAN LOVE**
**CB, NOTRE DAME**
The defending champs always seem to find a way to fill in needs, and Love would slide into a key role right away.

**57. PHILADELPHIA**
**NASIR ADDERLEY**
**FS, DELAWARE**
Pairing Adderley with Malcolm Jenkins would set up a seamless passing of the torch in a couple seasons.

**58. DALLAS**
**CHAUNCEY GARDNER-JOHNSON**
**FS, FLORIDA**
The safety spot may be the position in biggest need of an upgrade on the Cowboys roster.

**59. INDIANAPOLIS**
**ZACH ALLEN**
**DE, BOSTON COLLEGE**
Indy needs to re-stock its defensive line, much like the way it did to the offensive line unit last season. Allen makes a lot of sense here.

**60. LOS ANGELES CHARGERS**
**DRE'MONT JONES**
**DT, OHIO STATE**
The Buckeyes product would be reunited with former teammate Joey Bosa to create havoc in the Chargers' 4-3 defensive alignment.

**61. KANSAS CITY**
**DARRELL HENDERSON**
**RB, MEMPHIS**
A true speedster, Henderson would fill the void created by Kareem Hunt and blend into the Kansas City mantra of "need for speed."

**62. NEW ORLEANS**
**KHALEN SAUNDERS**
**DT, WESTERN ILLINOIS**
An EIU grad, Sean Payton would let loose the high-motor small-school stud from WIU.

**63. KANSAS CITY**
(via Los Angeles Rams)
**RILEY RIDLEY**
**WR, GEORGIA**
Adding an underneath route runner and possession wideout such as Ridley to complement the Chiefs' outside receivers would be a luxury for Patrick Mahomes.

**64. NEW ENGLAND**
**JJ ARCEGA-WHITESIDE**
**WR, STANFORD**
You could state a case for plenty of traits that fit the Patriots characteristics here.

# Quarterbacks

**OVERVIEW** The NFL Draft quarterback class of 2019 has been scrutinized for its lack of marquee prospects. It surely was a tough act to follow after seeing how well many from the 2018 class fared as rookies after five were selected in the first round.

While this year's crop does not match the same talent level, there could be more quarterbacks chosen in the first round than anticipated.

A pair of "one-year wonders" lead the charge with Dwayne Haskins of Ohio State and Kyler Murray of Oklahoma. Haskins, took the Big Ten by storm, cementing his Buckeyes legacy with a record-setting season. Meanwhile, Murray captured the attention of an entire nation with an exhilarating performance on his way to winning the Heisman Trophy.

Other quarterbacks such as Daniel Jones of Duke and Drew Lock of Missouri possesses favorable traits that could mold them into next-level starters. Then you have some wild cards such as West Virginia spinner Will Grier and Jarrett Stidham of Auburn, once considered to be in the first-round mix but now on the outside looking in.

With so many teams in need of a quarterback, don't be shocked to see many of them come off the board earlier than expected.

**2019 CLASS GRADE C+**

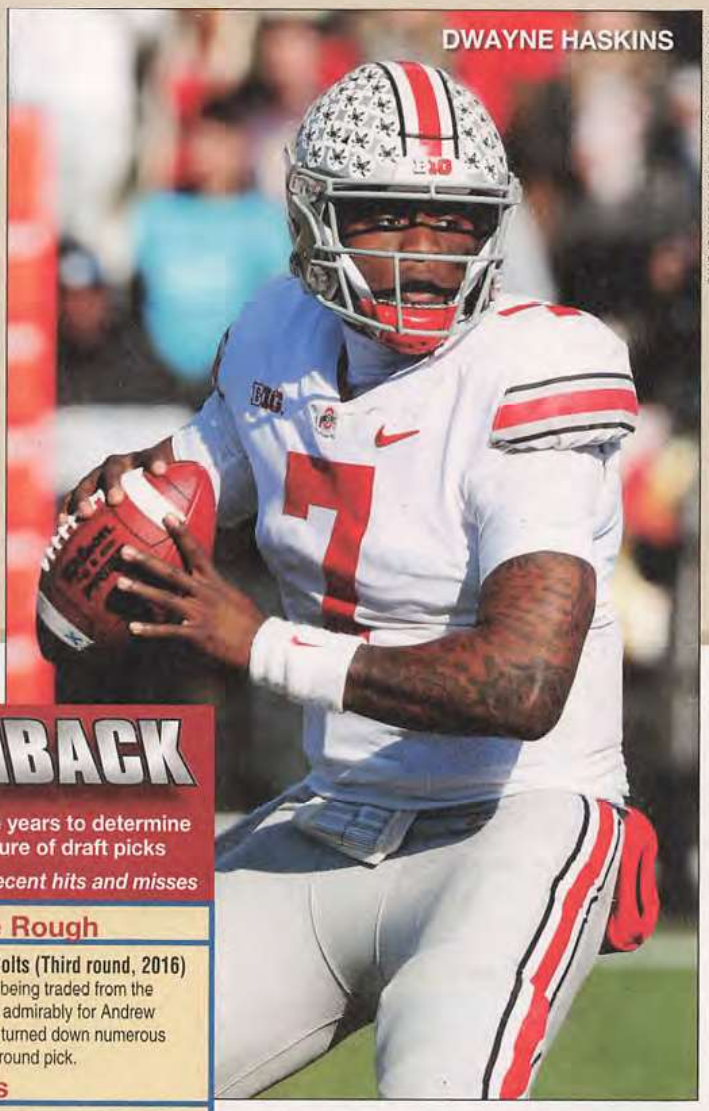


PHOTO BY MITCH STRINGER-USA TODAY SPORTS

*Denotes underclassman

## 1. DWAYNE HASKINS, Ohio State*

6-2, 214 40 time: 4.75 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** His resiliency and production for the Buckeyes in 2018 was one for the ages. In what was one of the most decorated single-season performances of all-time, Haskins smashed the previous Big Ten records held by Drew Brees with 4,831 passing yards (which also led the nation) and 50 touchdown passes.

Haskins patiently waited for an opportunity, backing up J.T. Barrett, and would beat out Joe Burrow and Tate Martell for the starting job once Barrett departed. His performance last season earned him 2018 Big Ten Player of the Year, third-team All-America honors, the Rose Bowl MVP and a trip to New York City as a Heisman Trophy finalist.

He can make every throw in the book and shows a natural feel for the game. Haskins has the potential to be a Pro Bowl-caliber quarterback at the next level.

**STRENGTHS:** A strong-armed pocket passer who makes quick, accurate decisions with the football and shows great anticipation. Able to get rid of the ball extremely quickly, plus has the arm strength to make all the throws and shows great poise in the pocket. Not afraid to go downfield, and his deep-ball accuracy allows him to drop it in the bucket with the best of them.

Demonstrates the toughness to absorb a big hit in order to make the play and can complete throws under duress. A compact throwing motion and sound lower body mechanics allow for a quick release, along with tremendous ball velocity. Does an excellent job progressing through his reads and sprays the ball all over the field.

When he does sense tight coverage, he tosses the ball so that only his wideout can make a play; he has limited his turnovers this way, as evidenced with just eight interceptions in 533 pass attempts last season. Shows tremendous athleticism when eluding the rush; is able to improvise and throw on the move. Doesn't lack confidence and isn't shy about letting you know how talented he is.

**WEAKNESSES:** While he doesn't possess prototypical size, Haskins is certainly tall enough, but inside push from defenders can somewhat limit his vision in the pocket. A one-year starter, his lack of experience goes against the grain of what NFL teams usually look for in college quarterbacks — playing time. A good athlete who can make plays with his feet if needed, but Haskins isn't much of a running threat for defenses to have to worry about.

Operates out of the shotgun, so playing under center is foreign to him and one of the biggest adjustments he'll likely face when making the transition to the pros. Ohio State quarterbacks have been known to flame out in the pros, and Urban Meyer has failed to produce a lasting NFL-caliber quarterback since Alex Smith in 2005.

These are just labels, but the stigmas do exist ... and there will be skeptics who view Haskins as a "system" quarterback.

## FLASHBACK

**It takes at least three years to determine the success or failure of draft picks**

*Here's a snapshot of recent hits and misses*

### Diamond in the Rough

**Jacoby Brissett, Patriots/Colts (Third round, 2016)**
Made 16 starts in 2017 after being traded from the Patriots to the Colts, filling in admirably for Andrew Luck. Indianapolis has since turned down numerous trade offers, including a first-round pick.

### Swing and Miss

**Christian Hackenberg, Jets (Second round, 2016)**
Out of the league after two woeful seasons on Broadway, Hackenberg has taken his act to the new Alliance of American Football league to help save his career.

### Breakout Player

**Sam Darnold, Jets (First round, 2018)**
No. 1 pick Baker Mayfield had more production, but watch for Darnold, who showed glimpses of stardom in his rookie year. The pairing with new head coach Adam Gase should elevate his game.

## PROTOTYPE

### ✔ Accuracy

**Dwayne Haskins, Ohio State**
Sure, he's been known to miss an occasional pass, but when you take a look at the full body of work, Haskins is not only on the mark most of the time, he delivers the ball with quickness.

### ✔ Arm Strength

**Drew Lock, Missouri**
While his game comes with flaws, there's no denying Lock's arm talent. You simply can't teach that, which is why so many NFL teams are infatuated with his ability.

### ✔ Setup/Release

**Jarrett Stidham, Auburn**
Mechanically, Stidham is well put together, demonstrating a fluid, smooth throwing motion, along with the footwork necessary to line up under center at the next level.

### ✔ Reading Defenses

**Daniel Jones, Duke**
A notorious film-room junkie, Jones has watched countless hours of quarterbacks past and present, in addition to studying his opponents, which shows up in the way he progresses through reads.

### ✔ On the Move

**Kyler Murray, Oklahoma**
It's quite possible that Murray is the most elusive quarterback we've ever seen to come out of the college ranks; his short stature and agility make him slippery when on the move.

### ✔ Intangibles

**Gardner Minshew, Washington State**
Minshew demonstrates all the leadership skills you could ask for; accountability, hard-working, command of the huddle and pride in his cadence.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Dak Prescott, Dallas Cowboys — Cool, calm and collective in the pocket, with the confidence and arm talent to make any throw required.

**Grade: 8.3**

### 2. DANIEL JONES, Duke*

6-5, 220 40 time: 4.7 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The David Cutcliffe disciple won teams over during team meetings and the interview process leading up to the draft. When Cutcliffe proclaims a quarterback as a first-round pick, NFL scouts pay attention. Jones' mechanics and smarts compensate for his lack of elite arm strength, allowing him to receive first-round consideration.

A cerebral quarterback with great mentors in his life such as Cutcliffe and the Manning family, Jones originally committed to Princeton. He is also known to be very humble, well prepared and extremely smart. He graduated from Duke with a degree in economics before bypassing his final year of college eligibility and decided to enter the draft.

He certainly ended his collegiate career with a bang, playing the game of his life in the Blue Devils' rout over Temple in the Independence Bowl and then earning Senior Bowl MVP honors for his in-game performance.

However, while Jones had plenty of positive reps during the Senior Bowl and certainly didn't hurt his draft stock, he did leave scouts desiring just a little bit more. Teams will gush about his intangibles, but there are still some arm limitations that could hinder his development if asked to start right away.

**STRENGTHS:** Shows nice touch and anticipation; has a natural feel for the pass rush in the pocket. Highly accurate in the short-to-intermediate passing game. Demonstrates the ability to be an effective thrower when on the move and is a smart decision-maker. He slightly improved his completion percentage this past year, connecting on 60.5 percent of his throws.

He can slip off arm tackles and has enough mobility to be able to extend plays. His play-action fakes and shoulder shimmies are some of the finer details he takes pride in, which separates him from other signal-callers. He is capable of busting loose for big runs when presented with the opportunity. In each of the past three seasons, he rushed for at least 300 yards and totaled 1,323 rushing yards during that span.

His toughness has certainly made a strong impression on evaluators, as the team captain returned to action just three weeks after breaking his collarbone with the help of a 3D-printed brace. Has experience playing in a pro-style offense and possesses top-notch leadership intangibles.

Has pulled the occasional rabbit out of the hat with five career punts, averaging 34 yards per attempt. Was a high school basketball standout, which shows up in his athleticism.

**WEAKNESSES:** For all the hype surrounding Jones, he never quite fulfilled his potential. The lack of zip and ball velocity could be an issue at the next level. His arm strength is just average and he has somewhat of a long delivery, which hurts his throws that require timing. While he is an effective runner with the ball in his hands, he seems to lack pocket presence at times. Credit him for his willingness to hang in the pocket, but his tendency to hold onto the football too long resulted in a lot of sacks and big hits.

He rarely slides and has left himself susceptible to unnecessary collisions. Durability will be a concern if he continues these bad habits. He didn't always have the best supporting cast around him and for that, his completion percentage did suffer and he also dealt with a lot of drive-killing drops.

However, his career average of 6.4 yards per attempt in college is still a bit concerning, as he may need a dink-and-dunk type system in order to have success at the next level. Had some disappointing losses on his resume and was on the wrong end of some lopsided blowouts.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Josh McCown, New York Jets — His football acumen and ability to compensate for arm limitations will allow him to play in the league for a long time.

**Grade: 8.0**

### 3. KYLER MURRAY, Oklahoma

5-10, 195 40 time: 4.58 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Based on the success of Baker Mayfield and Lamar Jackson, the undersized quarterback stigma could be softening among NFL decision-

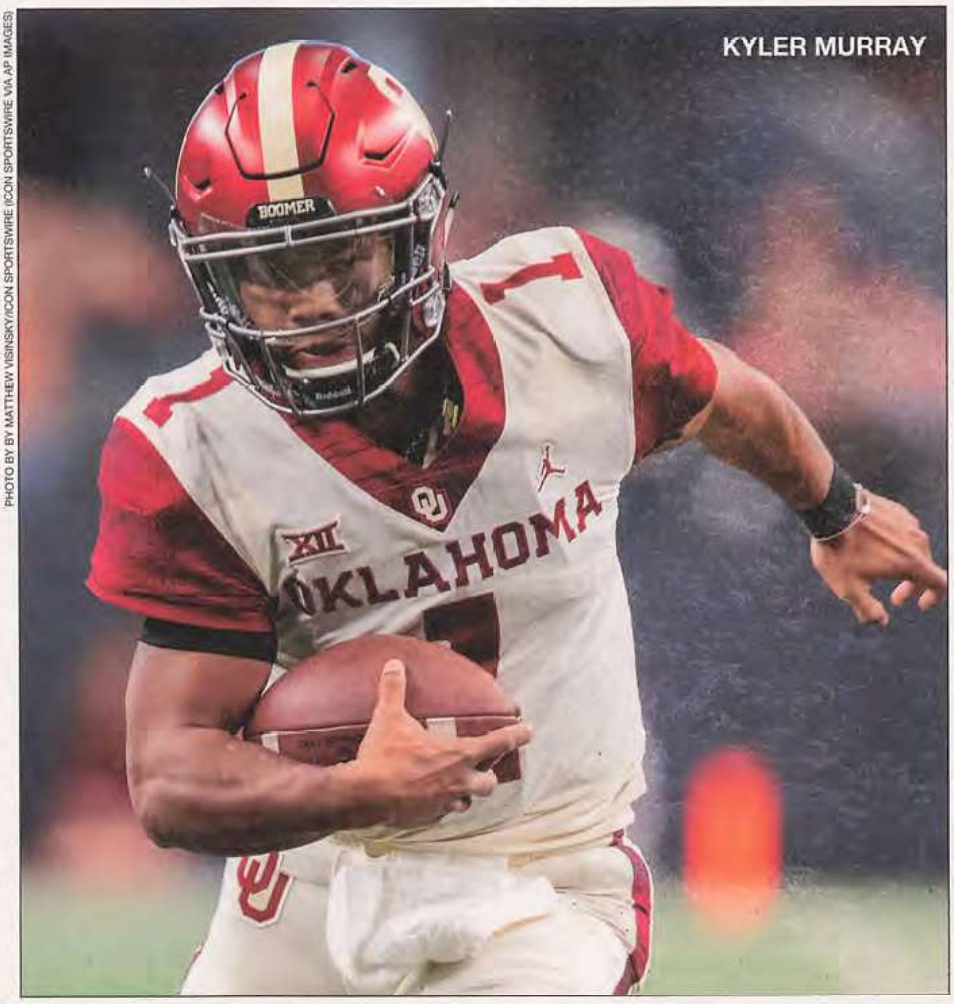


PHOTO BY BY MATTHEW VISINSKY/ICON SPORTSWIRE /ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA AP IMAGES

makers. Murray is too intriguing of a talent to pass up.

In the past, a player of his size with a professional contract in another sport, such as Charlie Ward (basketball), wouldn't even think twice about the decision to play football, but Murray is such a unique talent, we may have never seen anything like him before.

After transferring from Texas A&M, Murray sat for two seasons behind Mayfield, who went No. 1 overall in the 2018 NFL Draft. You can certainly see a reflection of Mayfield's game and how it has rubbed off on Murray in his style of play. Murray actually upped him this past season, accounting for a school-record 5,362 yards of total offense, plus 54 touchdowns. The 2018 Heisman Trophy winner made Oklahoma the first school to have back-to-back winners of the stiff-armed trophy by two different players.

An NFL team looking to make a play for Murray must be all-in. First, they must be willing to invest a first-round pick in the player and, secondly, they must build an offense predicated around his skill-set, which features a moving pocket and plenty of RPO reads.

While Murray is small in stature, his heart and passion for the game outweighs all the negative aspects, and he possesses the skills to be a must-watch dynamo on Sundays.

**STRENGTHS:** His athleticism and arm talent has coaches and GMs pressing rewind quite often in film study sessions. Running the Lincoln Riley offensive scheme that is currently in demand at the NFL level, Murray posted video game numbers last season with 4,361 passing yards and 1,001 rushing yards, while completing nearly 70 percent of his passes, along with a sparkling 42-7 touchdown-to-interception ratio and 12 rushing touchdowns.

His mobility and athletic ability enable him to slip tackles or run out of bounds and avoid big hits when running with the football. He can make all the throws — and the special ones, too. He can burn opposing defenses with a 60-yard bomb or a 60-yard run on any given play.

It's remarkable to watch Murray operate as he knifes through opposing defenses using his smarts, instincts, arm and legs. Suddenly, the scoreboard lights up and it's like watching Sonic the Hedgehog on the football field. His 11.6 yards per pass attempt and 7.2 yards per carry were incredible last season.

**WEAKNESSES:** Size, or lack of it, is the obvious trait that will worry some teams. He'll need to add weight and bulk up at least an additional 10 pounds to absorb the NFL hits he will face. His accuracy tends to dip when he is forced to get rid of the ball faster than he'd like. Pressuring him increases his chance to tuck and run the ball, but it can also lead to errant throws, which is how Alabama successfully slowed him down (at least early) in a semifinal game in the College Football Playoff.

He operates primarily from the shotgun. It remains to be seen if his next team will require him to play under center, but he lacks in-game experience doing it. A potential baseball career makes his long-term future cloudy. Can his body withstand the rigors of a 16-plus NFL game schedule? Will he be able to see over his fellow linemen who stand much taller than him? These are questions that NFL decision-makers are mulling when weighing the risks of drafting the two-sport superstar.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Russell Wilson, Seattle Seahawks — A pocket passer first who looks to throw the ball downfield, but defenses must account for with his ability to beat them with his feet.

**Grade: 7.8**

### 4. DREW LOCK, Missouri

6-4, 223 40 time: 4.89 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** We've seen players such as Blaine Gabbert and Blake Bortles get pushed up into the first round based on necessity, and Lock could be the beneficiary of a weak quarterback crop this year.

Lock is a mixed bag. Evaluators will love his size, athleticism and arm talent, along with the ability to play outside of a moving pocket. However, coaches will also have to learn to live with his varying arm angles and back-foot throws. It's just part of the deal.

He can make all the throws required and has flashed the potential to be a franchise quarterback. He seemed to be at complete ease with the media during interview sessions at the Senior Bowl, a contrast to what we've seen from Lock in his earlier days at Missouri. He's a consummate team player whose leadership and team camaraderie is contagious. He seemed to make a seamless transition under new offensive coordinator Derek Dooley during his senior season, whose tutelage seems to have paid great dividends.

One noticeable area in Lock's game is his improved patience in the pocket and progressions through his reads. While he has made immense improvement in his overall development, Lock isn't a quarterback who can carry a team. He'll need a complementary run game and strong offensive line in order to maximize his potential.

**STRENGTHS:** Prototype size and cannon arm measures up with any quarterback in this year's draft class; you can hear the ball whiz by upon his release. In addition, his quick release and mobility make him a match for many of the offenses around the league. His ability to elude the rush and extend plays in the pocket are excellent traits that should translate well. He has proven to be able to stand in the pocket and complete throws with defenders around him.

At Missouri, he played in a more complex offense, which allowed him to read the entire field. One statistical trend that was nice to see is that Lock improved his completion percentage in each of the past four seasons, including a career-best 62.9 percent as a senior. Over the past three seasons, he has enjoyed a 3-to-1 touchdown-to-interception ratio (95 touchdowns, 31 interceptions). His 44 touchdowns in 2017 were a SEC single-season record.

He was also more dangerous down near the end zone as a senior, accounting for six rushing touchdowns, after having just three in his three previous seasons combined. A four-year starter and three-time team captain, he has experience conducting the Air Raid offense under former offensive coordinator Josh Heupel.

**WEAKNESSES:** There are many areas of inconsistency. He possesses a howitzer of an arm and has demonstrated nice touch on his deep balls, but he's still missing on some of the easy throws. In fact, he can be a bit too confident in his arm, which leads to bad

## SPOTLIGHT

## Daniel Jones, Duke

***Take us through your decision-making process of declaring for the draft, what impacted your decision?*** I definitely considered the prospect of going early in the draft; that was some of the info that was available to me. It was something I considered but kind of in my gut about, where I was as a person, I was ready for the next step. But it wasn't an easy decision at all. I think going back to Duke would have been something I would have really enjoyed, and as a player I would had been able to develop under Coach (David) Cutcliffe for another year, which would have helped me a whole lot, in a lot of areas in my game. But I guess just from a gut feeling ... I knew I was ready.

***Do you think Coach Cutcliffe's reputation and previous success with quarterbacks make you more prepared for the NFL?*** I hope so, there's no way to really compare it with what other people have done, but I certainly feel like what he asked us to do and his expectations of quarterbacks is at the top of what college quarterbacks are expected to do. Whether that's manning the protection or something in the run game, you know I've been hopefully prepared for that through Coach Cutcliffe.

***Some of your mannerisms, looking off the safety, it's very similar to Eli and Peyton (Manning), do you watch a lot of film on them?*** Yeah, we watch that some. I watch them on my own. Two of my favorite players, I think that's (Cutcliffe's) influence coming in a little bit. Eli came back a couple years when I was there. This past spring, Peyton came as well, it was nice to just to kind of hang out and coach a little bit, but awesome to be around those guys and see them work out and be in action.

***How important is it for you to be the top quarterback drafted?*** I certainly look to play as well as I can but more importantly, the thing is, to prove I can play to my potential. So, play as well as I can, do what I can do and if that is the best in the class then that would be great, but I just look forward to playing as well as I can play.

***Do you think you're the best quarterback in this class?*** I don't know. I'm certainly confident in my abilities. My ability to play my position. I don't know how that compares to other guys but I think I am certainly very capable.

PHOTO BY CHARLES LECLAIRE-USA TODAY SPORTS

JARRETT STIDHAM

PHOTO BY JOHN DAVID MERCER-USA TODAY SPORTS

decisions. He must reel in some of his accuracy issues if he wants to have sustained success at the next level.

Another adjustment he likely will face will be lining up under center, something he hasn't been asked to do in college. He admitted at the Senior Bowl that NFL teams went as far back as the ninth grade to uncover the fact that he cheated on a math test in high school. Senior Bowl coach Jon Gruden also harped on him to communicate more with teammates and bark his cadence louder. His 56.9 career completion percentage doesn't match up with your typical first-round quarterback characteristics. One of the bigger knocks during his Tigers career was his inability to defeat top-level teams.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Blake Bortles, Jacksonville Jaguars — When Drew and Blake get off the bus, they look like NFL signal-callers, but when the bullets fly, you're not always sure how they are going to react.

**Grade: 7.7**

## 5. WILL GRIER, West Virginia

6-3, 218 40 time: 4.62 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Highly productive in college, Grier is a system quarterback who will need to have an offense catered to his skill-set in order to succeed. He will benefit greatly from a strong running attack and a scheme that allows him to improvise outside of the pocket.

The Florida transfer had the luxury of an extremely talented group of skill players around him in Morgantown and was able to get the ball out quickly to his playmakers, a key component to his success. He threw for 300 or more yards in a school-record 19 games at West Virginia and had multiple-touchdown games 20 times.

While he was consistent at West Virginia, Grier struggled at the Senior Bowl and was often off the mark, while holding onto the football too long. It could have been the unfamiliarity working with new receivers, but it had at least a few scouts questioning whether his skills translate to the NFL.

Asking Grier to start may be more than he can handle at this point in time, but it's a role he can possibly grow into with the right coaching and scheme.

**STRENGTHS:** Shows excellent timing and anticipation, capable of throwing receivers open, along with the necessary arm velocity to thread the needle on a handful of throws. He excels at adapting to plays as they develop and biding time in the pocket. Appears to have great field vision and strong understanding of where to go with the football; he definitely took advantage of his speedy wideouts by throwing over the top of opposing defenses for a bunch of his touchdowns.

Knows how to look off the safety and move him out of position with his eyes. Has a very effective pump-fake and throws an especially beautiful fade pattern. He enjoyed a remarkable stretch during his senior campaign, tallying at least 330 passing yards in every game except one.

Son of a football coach, his father, Chad, was a backup quarterback at East Carolina and was Will's head coach on state high school championship teams in North Carolina. The coaching staff at WVU gave him a lot of freedom at the line of scrimmage to audible. Thrives in an up-tempo spread attack. He finished with a 165.2 career passer rating, which ranked ninth all-time in NCAA history.

A mature leader on and off the field, he is already married and has one daughter.

**WEAKNESSES:** The one game in which he struggled mightily in 2018 was against Iowa State, which provided the blueprint on how to stop Grier. The Cyclones frustrated him all game by sending constant blitzes, and it resulted in seven sacks as he was held to a season-low 100 passing yards. He saw a variety of different defensive packages in that matchup, which kept him guessing on his pre-snap reads. Due to that performance, questions remain about his ability to handle pressure.

He did not play in a pro-style type of system and almost seems uncomfortable in the pocket; he would much prefer to be on the move and scramble around. Said he "tore his ankle up" in the Texas game last season, which he didn't reveal until attending the Senior Bowl in January.

He was suspended 12 months for violating the NCAA's policy on performance-enhancing drugs during his time with the Florida Gators. He claimed that he took an over-the-counter supplement called Ligandrol without consulting the team's medical staff. He seemed forthcoming about the topic, which NFL teams appreciate.

**Grade: 7.4**

## 6. JARRETT STIDHAM, Auburn

6-2, 214 40 time: 4.68 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Stidham, once considered to be a potential franchise quarterback, saw his draft stock plummet last season due to some shaky performances in big-time spots. He had a sharp week of practice at the Senior Bowl, showcasing his ability to line up under center and demonstrating fundamentally sound footwork during his three-, five- and seven-step drops. While he did tend to force a few throws, Stidham appeared very comfortable in the pocket and handled the media very well.

Stidham, who began his career at Baylor, possesses enough arm talent to make most throws needed at the next level. He believes having dealt with adversity on and off the field has helped prepare him for the next level. His potential and skill-set are still comparable to some of the higher-rated quarterbacks in this year's class, so it wouldn't be surprising if he outplays some of them in the long run.

Any team in need of a quarterback but fails to select one early on could find Stidham to be a handsome consolation prize.

**STRENGTHS:** An intelligent, accurate pocket passer with a live arm, Stidham impresses with his poise, leadership, ability to elude the rush and toughness. His throwing mechanics are compact and he gets rid of the ball rather quickly. Shows great placement in throwing receivers open and his touch on short passes is outstanding. He can spin it into a tight window, but he also understands when to take some steam off for a catchable check-down. Understands how to find throwing lanes; does a good job of altering his throwing platform and is capable of sidearm throws, as well as his natural over-the-top delivery.

An above-average athlete for the position, he's capable of dancing out of trouble and scrambling effectively. Operates play-action effectively and shows the ability to connect while throwing on the run. He isn't a threat to beat you with his feet by any means but shows a good nose for the end zone with nine career rushing touchdowns.

Made a conscious effort to work with the Auburn coaching staff on cutting down his turnovers entering 2018 and has been working with quarterback coach Jordan Palmer during the offseason over the past few years.

**WEAKNESSES:** He will need to develop the ability to throw from a tight pocket and see the entire field. At times, he reads just half the field, hits the eject button and bails early on plays. His lower-body mechanics will need some refinement until drop-backs feel more natural to him. Stidham did not play under center and will have to adapt this part of his game at the next level, but he seemed to already be making the transition during the Senior Bowl.

At times, he can make NFL-caliber throws look easy. In other instances, he can make head-scratching choices, so his consistency can be frustrating to watch from an evaluation standpoint. His completion percentage dipped in each of the past three seasons from 68.8 percent as a freshman, down to 60.7 percent as a junior. While his accuracy has fluctuated, he has been good about limiting interceptions with just 13 in 37 games played, while tossing 48 touchdowns.

**Grade: 7.3**

## 7. CLAYTON THORSON, Northwestern

6-4, 226 40 time: 4.76 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The Northwestern team captain began the year on a limited "pitch count" due to his

offseason shoulder surgery. He endured an inconsistent season and while it didn't always look pretty, he willed the Wildcats to victories, as Thorson wrapped up his career as the school's all-time leader in wins (27).

His ability to respond to pressure deserves praise, as he has proven to be a gutsy performer on multiple occasions. He chose to pass on the Senior Bowl, but with more than 50 career starts under his belt, there is plenty of film for scouts to scour. The overall body of work is a mixed bag, but there is no denying that Thorson showed flashes of brilliance and great toughness during his Wildcats career.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses a better combination of size, arm strength and athleticism than his Northwestern predecessors, Trevor Siemian and Mike Kafka, both of whom were drafted. Ran an up-tempo, no-huddle offense, operating from the shotgun with a variety of option plays. Showcases the ability to squeeze the ball into tight windows and seems to thrive off play-action.

Flashed deceptive scrambling ability and is capable of picking up the first down with his feet if presented the opportunity. His completion percentage gradually increased throughout the years, completing just 50.8 percent of his passes as a freshman and finishing with a more respectable 61.0 percent mark as a senior. His 61 career touchdown passes were more than any other quarterback in school history.

**WEAKNESSES:** He tends to lock in on his intended receiver and waits for him to make his break, rather than leading his target. His sense of an internal time clock must get faster, and he needs to learn how to make better pre-snap assessments. He failed to pick up the blitz versus Wisconsin in 2017 and it avalanched into a flurry of bad decision-making, something we would see glimpses of throughout his career.

Needs to improve his anticipation in the pocket and learn to see the field; he took more sacks and tossed more interceptions during his junior and senior seasons than he did during his freshman and sophomore campaigns. He nearly averaged one pick a game in college (45 career interceptions in 53 games). His deep balls flutter like butterflies and he appears to have predetermined where he is going to throw before the snap at times.

Suffered a torn ACL in a 2017 bowl game but made a strong recovery, taking the field just nine months later.

**Grade: 7.0**

## 8. TYREE JACKSON, Buffalo*

6-7, 249 40 time: 4.75 3rd-4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Jackson has a big upside because of his size and arm strength. He explored the idea of transferring to a bigger program after earning his undergraduate degree in social science/interdisciplinary studies but ultimately decided to declare early, despite receiving advice from the NFL Advisory Board that he should return to school.

A raw talent with all the tools necessary to be a starter at the next level, he is the ultimate wild card in this year's quarterback class. Jackson will be intriguing for NFL teams who have an aging quarterback and are looking to groom a successor.

The 2018 MAC Offensive Player of the Year threw for 3,131 passing yards, 28 touchdowns and 12 interceptions, plus seven touchdowns via the ground; he finished with 16 rushing touchdowns for his career.

Jackson was receiving a lot of third-to-fourth round grades from NFL scouts during the time of the Senior Bowl, where he earned Team MVP honors for the South team. Some scouts view Jackson to have the greatest ceiling of any quarterback in this year's class, but he is the ultimate risk/reward dilemma for NFL decision-makers.

PHOTO BY STAN SZETO-USA TODAY SPORTS

**STRENGTHS:** Can effortlessly sling the ball 70-80 yards down field with just a flick of the wrist; his arm strength would be among the top percentile in the NFL right now. Possesses elite NFL size — almost too big — but he moves around fairly well and stands tall in the pocket, which enables him to see the field well.

Makes good movements in the pocket when his launch point is challenged and gets the ball down the field with a variety of throws. Launches exceptional back-shoulder throws. Don't be deceived by his poor completion percentage last season (55.3 percent); the Bulls offense took a lot of shots downfield.

While he still had college eligibility remaining, he did manage to notch 31 college starts and was a four-year starter in high school, so he has plenty of experience. Has attended the Manning Passing Academy and has worked with private quarterback instructors Jordan Palmer and Terry Shea in California leading up to the draft.

**WEAKNESSES:** Possesses a long throwing motion — although his arm strength makes up for some of the timing. He is not a compact thrower in the pocket with his lower body. He admitted as much at the Senior Bowl, saying that lower-body mechanics was a focal point of his pre-draft training. At times his accuracy can be extremely shaky. He'll complete an electrifying pass and then follow it up with a couple of badly thrown balls. Needs to take some of the mustard off his short throws.

Could be asked to operate a more pro-style type offense at the next level, which would require him taking snaps under center, something he has very little reps at doing. He missed four games due to knee injury in 2017.

**Grade: 6.6**

## 9. BRETT RYPIEN, Boise State

6-2, 204 40 time: 4.86 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The four-year starter doesn't possess the elite arm strength or prototypical size worthy of deeming him a top-round selection, but Rypien is viewed as a draftable prospect with the maturity to make a quick transition to the NFL game. He did a fine job running the Dirk Koetter Buccaneers offense at the East-West Shrine Game.

The nephew of former Super Bowl MVP Mark Rypien, he understands how to manage expectations. He also appreciates the game's history and communicates with previous Boise State quarterbacks of the last 20 years trying to absorb as much knowledge as he can. It seems to have worked, as Rypien set career highs across the board as a senior in passing yards (3,705), completion percentage (67.3) and touchdowns (30), on his way to being named the Mountain West Conference Offensive Player of the Year. He finished with a career mark of 37-12 in games started.

The B.C. Lions own the CFL rights to Rypien, who is Canadian born but is expected to be a mid-round pick in the upcoming NFL Draft. He might not have star qualities, but he has all the looks to be able to stick around for the next 10 years.

**STRENGTHS:** With his quick release and razor-sharp accuracy, he allows his receivers time to adjust to the ball before the defender arrives. Timing, anticipation and quick decision-making are his strongest attributes. He showed a highly improved deep ball in 2018, to complement his precise throwing in the short-to-intermediate passing attack.

In addition to connecting at a higher rate downfield, he also improved his overall accuracy. His 90 career touchdown passes to just 29 interceptions is a reflection of his command of where to go with the football. A notorious film room junkie known for his detailed preparation.

**WEAKNESSES:** Had an up-and-down career and self-admittedly felt the pressure of trying to be Kellen Moore, which led to him trying to do too much. He claims that he really didn't settle into being himself until halfway through his junior campaign. Through it all, coaches maintained that he always handled criticism like a pro.

However, his most alarming weakness is his limited arm strength, which is the main reason why he isn't being viewed as a potential starter at the next level. He has underthrown his receivers on the deep ball on more than one occasion. He also doesn't throw well on the move and will need a clean pocket to be an effective passer in the pros.

**Grade: 6.2**

## 10. GARDNER MINSHEW, Washington St.

6-1, 224 40 time: 5.08 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Minshew began his well-traveled journey as a walk-on at Troy for six months before transferring to Northwest Mississippi Community College and guiding the Rangers to the MACJC Football Championship. Next, he would take his talents to East Carolina, where he spent parts of two seasons as a starter before Nick Saban came calling with an opportunity to transfer to Alabama.

Minshew would turn down his chance to be a backup for the Crimson Tide when he was approached by Air Raid innovator Mike Leach to join him at Washington State. Minshew had not run the Air Raid offense since Pee Wee ball, but he made the right decision to go to Pullman. Minshew responded by tossing for 4,776 passing yards (second in the nation).

He was named a team captain and starter for the Senior Bowl, in addition to being named one of the best practice players of the week by event staff. However, he didn't fare too well in the actual game, completing just 1 of 8 passes for 4 yards. While Minshew checks off all the boxes with his heart, determination and leadership, there are still too many limitations in his overall game to view him as anything more than a backup.

**STRENGTHS:** Mike Leach's offense creates some easy throws for his quarterbacks, and Minshew delivered some beautiful passes, showcasing deft touch and poise. He's a natural thrower who can improvise and make awkward throws across his body look good. Completed passes at an impressive clip of 70.7 percent during his final season, to go along with 38 touchdowns and only nine interceptions.

A three-sport athlete who also competed in basketball and baseball growing up. He has a reputation for being an extremely competitive person in everything he participates in from checkers and chess, to football. Owns strong bloodlines, as his dad, Flint, played football at Millsaps College in Mississippi and was named to that school's athletic Hall of Fame; Minshew's mother, Kim, played basketball at Mississippi State.

**WEAKNESSES:** His lack of arm strength and scrawny physique are the two most glaring weaknesses that stand out about his overall game. He'll need to shed the label of being a system quarterback. While the Air Raid offense has been a popular concept in the NFL of late, Mike Leach at Washington State has failed to produce many successful pro quarterbacks, with his previous pupil Luke Faulk (a sixth-round pick by the Titans who was cut his rookie year) serving as a prime example. Can Minshew finally be the player who bucks the trend?

**Grade: 6.0**

## 11. RYAN FINLEY, NC State

6-4, 208 40 time: 4.80 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Finley has the ability to throw the football quickly, with accuracy and good decision-making. He can play using different pocket movements and throwing platforms. He transferred from Boise State in the summer of 2016 after earning his degree in three years. He was granted a sixth year of eligibility and earned two master's degrees from North Carolina State.

Finley showed nice touch at the Senior Bowl but needs to get rid of the ball quicker; he had trouble finding his rhythm throughout the week. Has some polish to his game but may have already peaked to his potential. A bit of an older prospect, he'll turn 25 years old during his rookie season.

Finley has enough size and arm strength to play at the next level but isn't going to wow you in any one particular area. His draft grade varies around the league and his set of traits won't be for everyone, but Finley can be a positive addition in any quarterback room.

**STRENGTHS:** Known as an intellect on the field and in the classroom (holds three academic degrees), he makes keen decisions, a large reason why the Wolfpack enjoyed so much success on third downs (60 percent conversion rate). He processes through his progressions quickly and knows where to go with the football; he will take the check-down rather than forcing throws. Possesses a smooth throwing motion and compact footwork.

Appears to be calm in the pocket and has a natural feel for when the pass-rush encloses him. Has some experience playing under center and was given the authority to change plays at the line of scrimmage. Over the past three seasons, Finley accumulated 10,501 passing yards at North Carolina State, with 60 touchdowns and 25 interceptions. He completed 64.2 percent of his passes for his career.

**WEAKNESSES:** Has made a conscious effort to improve his athleticism in the pocket, which continues to be a work in progress. Doesn't own the big arm and will have to rely on his ability to throw with anticipation at the next level, which is something NFL teams must consider when selecting Finley. At times he appears tentative to throw the ball downfield. That deep ball doesn't command the respect of opposing defenses, which will then focus on shutting down his short-area passing.

Finley will tend to lock in on one receiver early on and tries to fit the ball into tight windows, relying on his throwing ability. A pure pocket passer with very limited mobility, his accuracy decreases when forced to throw under pressure. He'll need to bulk up an additional 10 to 15 pounds to handle the rigors of the NFL.

**Grade: 5.8**

## 12. JORDAN TA'AMU, Mississippi

6-3, 222 40 time: 4.86 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Ta'amu is another "Throwin' Samoan" — a nickname first used for former Washington State and NFL quarterback Jack Thompson in the 1970s and '80s — and is one of the better quarterbacks who receives little publicity. Ta'amu was assertive taking over as starter for the Rebels two seasons ago, when Shea Patterson was injured.

The Hawaii native received zero offers coming out of high school and began his college career at New Mexico Military. He was clearly one of the most impressive players at the East-West Shrine Game, showcasing his ability to line up under center and take command of the huddle, two things he wasn't asked to do during his time at Ole Miss. He garnered plenty of interest from NFL teams, as his game translates well to the next level.

Ta'amu is viewed as a developmental signal-caller whose smooth delivery, above-average arm strength and ability to extend plays makes him an ideal late-round quarterback prospect.

**STRENGTHS:** He possesses great zip, has an accurate arm and coaches rave about his football IQ. Shows the ability to make all the throws and flashes excellent touch on shorter-to-intermediate passes. Effective passer on the move, able to carry out fakes, roll out and make a play. His decision-making and compact throwing motion made for a smooth transition from junior college to the SEC. Possesses tremendous composure and poise — very little moves him emotionally or alters his body language. He's the same guy when things are going good as he is when things are trending bad.

Has an excellent pump fake that moves linebackers and safeties. Ta'amu completed 266 of 418 passes for 3,918 yards, 19 touchdowns and eight interceptions as a senior. His 326.5 yards per game was tops in the SEC and third in the nation, as he was the only quarterback in the conference to average 300-plus yards per game through the air. He also serves as a dual threat, running for 507 yards and 10 touchdowns over the past two years.

A Criminal Justice major, he was interning with the Oxford Police Department leading up to the draft in order to graduate.

**WEAKNESSES:** Operated from a shotgun/spread offensive attack, so while he apparently has already begun working on his footwork, it'll continue to be a point of emphasis as he learns to play under center. He benefited from arguably the best receiving corps in the nation, featuring three future pros. While Ta'amu is talented in his own right, his supporting cast definitely provided him with a boost in the production column. Despite a cast of star-studded players, Mississippi won just one SEC game this past year and finished 5-7 overall.

He suffered a minor foot injury during his senior season, which limited him in practice at times but didn't impact him missing any serious game time. He also dealt with a hand injury during the Rebels' final regular season game, but he was able to suit up for their Egg Bowl matchup. Will need to be more conscious of carrying the football with the correct hand when running down the sidelines.

**Grade: 5.6**

## 3 TO WATCH

### SLEEPER

**Tyree Jackson, Buffalo**
A raw slinger, Jackson is able to launch 70-yard rockets with a simple flick of the wrist. If allowed to sit and develop for a few years, he could develop into a starting quarterback with all the tools.

### COULD DISAPPOINT

**Drew Lock, Missouri**
His persistence to make off-angle arms throws — throws across his body and throws off the back foot on the run — usually doesn't translate well to the pros.

### SMALL SCHOOL STUD

**Easton Stick, North Dakota State**
A remarkable career that featured a 49-3 record and three FCS national championships, the dual-threat signal-caller looks to carry the Bison's torch to the next level.

## WORTH WATCHING

**Easton Stick, North Dakota State (6-2, 221)**
Delivers the ball quickly and does a nice job of looking off defenders, plus has dual-threat capability.

**Taylor Cornelius, Oklahoma State (6-6, 220)**
An efficient passer who carries out his fakes and demonstrates solid fundamentals along with great size.

**Kyle Shurmur, Vanderbilt (6-4, 224)**
Possesses prototypical size, a fluid, compact throwing motion and zip; the son of Pat Shurmur (Giants).

**Eric Dungey, Syracuse (6-2, 226)**
Must shake "injury prone" label, but is tough and was more accurate late in his senior season.

**David Blough, Purdue (6-0, 205)**
A once highly heralded recruit is a bit undersized but shows great leadership and capable arm strength.

**Jalen McClendon, Baylor (6-4, 219)**
Was impressive at the NFLPA Collegiate Bowl with his combination of size, athleticism and arm strength.

*For further analysis of the 2019 quarterbacks, visit www.nfldraftscout.com.*

# Running Backs

**OVERVIEW** It appeared that running back was en vogue again after seeing a total of three backs selected in the top five in the past three drafts (Saquan Barkley, 2018; Leonard Fournette, 2017; Ezekiel Elliott, 2016). But that trend won't continue in 2018.

Alabama running back Josh Jacobs possesses the best overall skill-set with his experience as a runner, pass-catcher and return man. On the other hand, his Crimson Tide teammate Damien Harris might have a more proven resume.

An extremely diverse group, there are a number of Power 5 conference prospects such as Trayveon Williams of Texas A&M, Benny Snell of Kentucky and David Montgomery of Iowa State, all of whom flash a unique skill-set, making them potential starters at the next level.

There are also a handful of mid-major players who could surprise at the next level, such as FAU's Devin Singletary and Memphis runner Darrell Henderson. If it's a scat-back teams are searching for, look no further than Myles Gaskin of Washington or Justice Hill of Oklahoma State.

Then you have your injury-prone backs with great upside such as Oklahoma's Rodney Anderson and Stanford's Bryce Love.

While there might not be a star-studded back worthy of a top five pick, there is certainly plenty of variety available.

**2019 CLASS GRADE**
**D**

PHOTO BY JASEN VINLOVE-USA TODAY SPORTS

*Denotes underclassman

### 1. JOSH JACOBS, Alabama*

5-9, 216 40 time: 4.49 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** He's noted as an extremely hard worker who the pro scouts view as having the total package. While Jacobs was never the workhorse back at Alabama, he showed off a well-rounded skill-set and was often used as a gadget player, constantly running in motion and being used on end-arounds or RPO reads.

More of a finesse runner than a power back — although he can definitely deliver a punch and finish in a physical way — Jacobs glides in the open field. He likes to work his way to the edge and cut it outside, which could prove difficult to do on a consistent basis in the NFL, but his overall skills are what have NFL teams buzzing.

In addition to his running and pass-catching abilities, Jacobs played on all four special team units and could star at the next level as a return man. In his time at Alabama, he was just scratching the surface, giving him the most tantalizing mix of production and potential among running backs in this draft class, especially because he projects as a likely three-down weapon.

**STRENGTHS:** A do-it-all back who can move the chains running or receiving. Jacobs runs with good strength, quickness, ability to elude defenders and enough burst to pick up big chunks of yardage. Shows good toughness and will look to lower the shoulder for extra yardage. Can battle through the scrub and push forward for a positive run when there is not much available.

Was able to excel in multiple routes at Alabama. He can line up out wide and take a reverse the distance of the field; he can line up in the slot; he has been used as a blocker out in space. Is used in pre-snap motion quite a bit, sometimes as a decoy, other times as a pass-catcher out of the backfield. His receiving ability is one of his best attributes. Has been used out of the wildcat formation and also served as a kick returner.

Averaged a remarkable 31.4 yards per kick return this past year, including one touchdown. A solid blocker.

**WEAKNESSES:** His running style is a bit upright and he doesn't gain many yards after contact. While he is more than capable of keeping it between the tackles, many of his chunk plays came off tackle. Many of his runs up the middle result in few yards. His cutback ability is average. His blocking out in space is better than it is when asked to stay back to protect his quarterback. He'll need to be more consistent in execution of blocking assignments moving forward.

Skill-set seems to lean more toward a change-

## FLASHBACK

**It takes at least three years to determine the success or failure of draft picks**

*Here's a snapshot of recent hits and misses*

### Diamond in the Rough

**James Conner, Steelers (Third round, 2017)**
It was an ugly season in the "Steel City," but Conner was the one of the biggest surprises of the NFL, accounting for 1,470 total yards and 13 touchdowns.

### Swing and Miss

**Rashaad Penny, Seahawks (First round, 2018)**
There is plenty of time for Penny to recapture some of the glimmer that made him a first-round pick, but he gained just 419 rushing yards in 16 games as a rookie.

### Breakout Player

**Sony Michel, Patriots (First round, 2018)**
After falling 69 yards shy of the 1,000-yard barrier as a rookie, Michel gained 336 rushing yards with six scores in three playoff games last season, helping guide the Patriots to another Super Bowl title.

## PROTOTYPE

### ✔ Inside Running

**Elijah Holyfield, Georgia**
No running back in this year's draft class is going to battle for the tough yards like Holyfield, who is an ideal two-down back and short-yardage runner.

### ✔ Outside Running

**Josh Jacobs, Alabama**
With more bounce to the ounce, Jacobs possesses great acceleration, can turn the corner in an instant and bust free for a big run on any given play.

### ✔ Breaking Tackles

**Devin Singletary, FAU**
The man they call "Motor" runs hard and aggressive, which leads to big chunks of yardage; playing in Conference USA robbed him from being in the national spotlight.

### ✔ Receiving

**Trayveon Williams, Texas A&M**
A great combination of running and receiving, Williams is just as dangerous as a pass-catcher out of the backfield as he is on the ground.

### ✔ Blocking

**Alec Ingold, Wisconsin**
Your prototypical Badgers fullback who leaves no question unanswered about his ability to pave rushing lanes for his backs to run through.

### ✔ Intangibles

**Benny Snell, Kentucky**
The rambunctious Snell plays with a contagious passion for the game that helps elevate players around him; he helped guide the Wildcats to their most victories (10) since 1977.

of-pace or complementary back, such as the role he played in Tuscaloosa, rather than the back who carries the main workload. Said he dealt with "mental fatigue" in national championship game loss to Clemson. Suffered a shoulder injury dating back to his junior season in high school.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Sony Michel, New England Patriots — An all-purpose jackknife-type back who possesses a compact frame and can handle any role, including special teams.

**Grade: 8.1**

### 2. TRAYVEON WILLIAMS, Texas A&M*

5-9, 200 40 time: 4.44 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** He bulked up about 20 pounds in 2018 and took full advantage of playing with a fullback for the first time in his career, resulting in a career-best year. He cemented his Texas A&M legacy with a humdinger in the Gator Bowl, setting the Aggies' single-season rushing record on a 93-yard touchdown scamper and giving him 1,760 rushing yards on the season, to go along with 19 touchdowns. With little else to prove, he decided to skip his senior season and declare for the draft.

After Jacobs at No. 1, it appears this running back class is closely bunched among the next several prospects. Williams' versatility and electrifying skills separates him a little bit, projecting as a potential star as a feature back in the NFL.

**STRENGTHS:** Williams boasts an impressive frame and great vision, which can lead to home runs due to his explosiveness in the open field. The do-it-all back has been a factor in the rushing and receiving game, in addition to being an aggressive, physical blocker who doesn't shy away from contact. He shows excellent awareness picking up the blitz and protecting his quarterback.

His 2,038 all-purpose yards were also a school record. His 6.5 yards per carry and 135.4 yards per game were the top marks in the SEC, and a reflection of how he accelerates and wastes no time reaching his best speed.

His performance last season led to him being named team MVP, also winning the Offensive Leadership Award and the Top Conditioned Athlete Award.

**WEAKNESSES:** A major point of emphasis heading into his senior year was improving his patience as a runner. While he has made great strides in that department, he'll need to continue to preach that trait as he transitions to the next level. He has dropped the occasional pass, but overall has been especially effective on bubble screens.

While his effort is commendable in pass protection — and he was asked to do it quite a bit — Williams is just too small to handle the bigger interior defensive linemen who are able to barrel over him with ease. He might be a liability in third-down pass pro situations. Questions about his size and strength still remain.

**Grade: 7.3**

### 3. DAMIEN HARRIS, Alabama

5-10, 215 40 time: 4.55 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** He lacks elite level speed and athleticism but all Harris has ever known is how to get the job done. The powerful runner has proven to be an effective all-around back, and while he didn't post earth-shattering testing numbers in Alabama's timeshare backfield, his body of work makes him an early round pick.

If teams want a bit more flash and a higher ceiling, they might opt for a back further down this list. But Harris, a complete back with a proven resume, seems like a safe pick ... and he can gash defenses for big chunks of yardage on the ground, too. He can also line up in the slot and beat opponents via the air.

He definitely got the job done against fierce competition in the SEC and projects to make an immediate impact at the next level.

**STRENGTHS:** What makes him so remarkable is his powerful running style combined with his vision and cutback ability. Harris is also a threat out of the backfield and showcases the speed necessary to finish off runs. He fights through contact and bulldozes his way for extra yardage, but his balance and burst might be two of his most desirable traits. A gifted receiver, he can really put his foot in the ground and go after the catch.

He has a well-developed lower half that allows him to shed would be tacklers and he has the shiftiness to make defenders miss in the open field. Harris has excellent field awareness; he knows how to find the marker and can tightrope the sideline as he consistently fights to reach the line to gain.

**WEAKNESSES:** While his hips and flexibility are somewhat limited, he possesses enough wiggle to make defenders whiff in the open field. His leadership was questioned by the coaching staff earlier in his career, which he made a point of emphasis to improve upon as a senior. He also noted that he wanted to sharpen his mental focus as another reason why he returned for his senior season. He has dealt with a handful of minor foot and leg injuries, but they never required him to miss an extended period of time.

**Grade: 7.3**

### 4. BENNY SNELL JR., Kentucky*

5-10, 223 40 time: 4.55 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The Wildcats' all-time leading rusher has been a workhorse back during his time in Lexington and possesses excellent size, while flashing a knack for making defenders miss. He seems to get a full head of steam with the more work he gets and needs to be fed in order to reap the fourth-quarter benefits of him wearing out the opposing defense.

His durability, along with his proven ability to carry the workload, makes him a likely starter at the next level. Get used to hearing the catchphrase, "Snell Yeah!"

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses prototype build, with good patience, balance and just enough wiggle and burst. Demonstrates impressive speed and agility. A power-

PHOTO BY DAVID ROSENBLUM/ICON SPORTSWIRE (ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA AP IMAGES)

ful, downhill runner who can slip through tackles, Snell constantly keeps his legs churning upon contact and can push the pile for additional yardage. Has taken direct snaps from center and ran the draw play successfully on several occasions. He finished as the school's all-time leading rusher with 3,873 yards.

A fun-loving player who also holds teammates accountable; his leadership is a great appeal. His passion and affection for the game is contagious. Possesses strong bloodlines as his father Benny Sr., played for the Ravens and his great uncle, Matt Snell, was part of the Jets' Super Bowl III team.

**WEAKNESSES:** He isn't going to outrun the defense; his speed and athleticism are limited, which doesn't suit many of the modern-day NFL offenses that require speed. He can be indecisive at times in terms of hitting the hole or having to alter his run pattern.

Seems to run harder down near the goal line; if he could sustain that same type of motor and burst throughout an entire game, he would really elevate his game. Wasn't really involved in the Wildcats' passing attack.

**Grade: 7.2**

### 5. DARRELL HENDERSON, Memphis*

5-9, 200 40 time: 4.55 2nd-3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** While perhaps lacking an elite package of size and breakaway speed, Henderson possesses excellent vision, subtle shifts and has an effective stiff-arm to weave his way through defenses. Memphis hasn't had a back this talented since the Pittsburgh Steelers made DeAngelo Williams the 27th overall pick back in 2006, and Henderson is just the third Memphis player to declare early since 2001 (Dontari Poe and Paxton Lynch).

Henderson's career average of 8.225 yards per carry barely edged former Houston running back Chuck Weatherspoon for the highest in NCAA history since 1956. Henderson could potentially thrive in a zone blocking scheme that would take advantage of his dynamic one-cut-and-up running style.

**STRENGTHS:** A high-energy player who runs with ruthless effort and burst. He constantly keeps his legs churning upon contact and doesn't often go down very easily. Demonstrates good vision and burst, along with strong upper body, which makes for a powerful stiff-arm. Footwork and balance are two other areas that enhance his value.

Was a clean player off the field and always did everything asked of him, in addition to being an academic standout, according to coaches. He led the nation with 2,328 all-purpose yards last season.

**WEAKNESSES:** Lacks prototypical size and top-flight speed. Viewed as a liability in pass protection and is not considered to be a very good pass-catcher. Isn't built to gain the tough yardage and only carries the ball in his left hand, even when running on the right hand side of the field, which is sure to drive coaches nuts.

With just 431 carries for his career, there is some concern as to whether he can sustain carrying the workload full time for the long-term. There are also some who question the caliber of defenses he was regularly facing in the American Athletic Conference. Is he a one-year wonder?

**Grade: 6.9**

### 6. DEVIN SINGLETARY, FAU

5-9, 200 40 time: 4.52 2nd-3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The "Motor" man just doesn't stop, running hard between the tackles or on the edge, and he combines that with some nifty make-you-miss moves. Singletary shows exceptional change-of-direction capability and gains a tremendous amount of yardage after contact. He nearly broke the 2,000-yard rushing mark in 2017, falling just 82 yards shy and is widely regarded as the best player in FAU history.

Lofty expectations entering 2018 may have weighed on him, as his motor got off to a faulty start with just 150 rushing yards through his first three games (averaging 2.8 yards per carry). He rebounded rather nicely, gaining 1,198 rushing yards over his final nine game (averaging 5.8 yards per carry). Despite the bright production, playing in Conference USA does dim his accomplishments somewhat. Regardless, he's viewed as a prime-time back in this year's crop.

**STRENGTHS:** Breaks a ton of tackles and compiles more yards after contact than any other runner in this year's class. Possesses a stout, thick build, has good vision and patience, allowing his blocks to develop. He can cut on a dime and makes use of a powerful stiff-arm. He takes pride in carrying out his fakes.

While he has rarely been used in the passing attack, he still possesses a keen sense of finding the end zone, with an extraordinary 67 total touchdowns in 38 career games. He finished his three-year Owls career with 4,287 rushing yards over three seasons. Even more impressive is how hard it is to bring him down in the open field. His experience playing in a pro-style type of system under Lane Kiffin bodes well for his draft stock.

**WEAKNESSES:** Size is the obvious glaring weakness when compared to other running back prospects past and present. He doesn't have many long runs to boast on his highlight reel. Tends to resort to the chop block when blocking; he fails to engage or use his hands. His hands have also been non-existent in the passing game, as he fails to use his hands to engage when picking up defenders in the backfield. He needs to learn how to get his head turned around faster as a pass-catcher.

**Grade: 6.3**

### 7. RODNEY ANDERSON, Oklahoma

6-1, 220 40 time: 4.59 3rd-4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Let the record show, there have been plenty of college superstars who never panned out in the NFL due to a myriad of injuries and inability to stay healthy. Anderson is in danger of becoming one of those players. He managed to stay on the field in 2017, demonstrating exceptional cutback ability, power, burst and home run speed, on his way to accumulating 1,442 yards from scrimmage and 18 touchdowns. Can he recapture the same form and, if so, how long will it take to get back to full strength?

**STRENGTHS:** A longer, lean-framed runner with a knack for finding the right run lane and knows how to follow his blocks. He shows great strength and it usually takes a swarm of defenders to finally bring him down in the open field. Plays faster than the stopwatch might indicate and hits the hole with high knees. Is also a capable pass-catcher out of the backfield. A team leader who was named team captain. Take away the injuries and this is a first-round talent.

**WEAKNESSES:** Has had three season-ending injuries, including a right knee injury that grounded him before he could really take off in 2018. He suffered a fractured vertebra in his neck during 2016, and a broken leg ended his year prematurely in 2015. Durability is a major concern to say the least; he'll be entirely off the board for some teams. As for his playing time, Sooners head coach Lincoln Riley makes it a point of emphasis for all his backs to learn how to pass block, but Anderson apparently didn't receive the memo.

**Grade: 6.0**

# SPOTLIGHT

## Dexter Williams, Notre Dame

***Do you feel like you've been disrespected at all by the fact that your name is not brought up when people talk about the best back in this year's draft class?***

I wouldn't say disrespect; they have their own opinion. I know what I can do and what I can bring to the table. I'm not worried about what other people have to say if they under-look me. I feel like I've always been underrated, even coming out of high school. I wasn't one of the top running backs, I wasn't one of the top running backs in college, so it's just something to fuel the fire for me. Once I get to showcase my opportunity, I feel like I can move up the ranks and just show everybody that I'm definitely one of the top backs coming out in this class.

***What separates you from other backs in this class?*** I would say my vision, my explosiveness, my high-energy level. Just me being "Juice," me going out and having fun. I play the game with such a passion. I'm passionate about the game, I just really love going out and playing football. ... I would definitely say I'm a side running back to watch. Someone to make you say, "Wow, this dude is fast; this dude has vision; wow, this dude is doing a lot of things that a lot of guys might not do."

***You had a couple issues off the field, what will you tell NFL teams?*** I would definitely expect teams to ask me about that. ... One thing I'm going to have to show is that this is where I was and this is me now. A lot of those things that happened back then in the past, I don't regret it, but at the same time it helped me mature and become the man I am today. I would definitely say I'm much more mature. You get in a lot of situations you just make the most of it and making sacrifices. Making those sacrifices has helped me to become a better player on and off the field. It helped me elevate myself in life.

PHOTO BY RICH BARNES-USA TODAY SPORTS

PHOTO BY JUSTIN FORD-USA TODAY SPORTS

### 8. DAVID MONTGOMERY, Iowa State

5-10, 216 40 time: 4.63 3rd-4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A well-rounded back who can run block and catch, Montgomery is credited by Cyclones head coach Matt Campbell for being the player who helped turn around the Iowa State program and claims that the explosive runner would be the team's best route runner if he played receiver. His elusiveness in the open field is as good as it gets. Montgomery possesses a high ceiling and could ultimately turn out to be the best back in the draft.

**STRENGTHS:** More quick than fast, he possesses great cutback ability and demonstrates an excellent jump cut, along with swift change-of-direction capabilities. He really emphasizes his jukes well, using his shoulder and hips. In addition to his agility, Montgomery can also pick up the tough yards as a hard-nosed runner. Can score in a variety of ways down in the red zone; has been an excellent pass catcher out of the backfield and really made the most of working behind a porous offensive line unit. Known to be a high-character player.

**WEAKNESSES:** Montgomery showcases great open-field instincts but lacks elite-level speed. His lack of timed-speed and the impact that will have at the next level has been a hot topic in war rooms league-wide. Like many of the college running backs making the transition to the pros, Montgomery will need to refine his pass blocking skills. An upper-arm injury hindered him for the majority of last season. He was suspended for the first half of the Texas game due to fighting in the previous game against Baylor last season.

**Grade: 6.0**

### 9. MIKE WEBER, Ohio State*

5-9, 215 40 time: 4.52 3rd-4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Appeared to be in the game for just as many pass routes as he was for run attempts in 2018. Seemed to thrive at Ohio State sharing carries with J.K. Dobbins, and he would likely thrive in a similar capacity at the next level. He averaged an impressive 5.9 yards per carry in his career, which is a testament to what a steady performer he can be.

It only made sense for him to declare early, as Weber was stuck in a time-share and likely wouldn't have improved his draft stock much. If given the opportunity to play the lead role, Weber could prove to be a more productive pro player than he was in college.

**STRENGTHS:** Unlike most backs of his compact frame, Weber also possesses legitimate breakaway speed. Owns a rock-solid frame and is able to break arm tackles. His naturally low center of gravity allows him to bounce off would-be tacklers and pick up yards after contact. His receiving skills are good enough that he must be accounted for in the passing game. A sound blocker, he does a nice job of chipping a defender on his way to running a pass route.

**WEAKNESSES:** Isn't flashy in any one area but does a little bit of everything well. How scouts view his top gear will tell a lot about his eventual draft spot. A hamstring injury hindered him for most of his 2017 campaign, limiting him to just 111 touches. While he wasn't even the featured starter (J.K. Dobbins) on his own team, Weber is a pro-ready back who would continue to do well in a similar committee-type backfield at the next level.

**Grade: 5.8**

### 10. MYLES GASKIN, Washington

5-9, 193 40 time: 4.50 3rd-4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Doesn't have great strength or top-notch speed but runs with great heart and passion. Gaskin amassed 5,788 total yards during his career and finished as the school's all-time leading rusher with 5,323 yards and its touchdown leader with an impressive 62 scores in 52 games played. He bypassed an opportunity to boost his draft stock by declining his invitation to the Senior Bowl. He's a ping pong ball in the open field and might be viewed as nothing more than a slasher at the next level due to his lack of size and liability in pass protection.

**STRENGTHS:** An elusive, cutback runner, he runs with a low center of gravity and waits patiently for his holes to develop. His burst and ability to make defenders miss are two of his most impressive traits, not to mention he has spin moves for days. An attentive runner with natural instincts, plus a proven track record of being durable and dependable. Will line up out wide, has been used in the wildcat in short yardage situations and has even tossed a touchdown pass in the red zone. Also a return man.

Shows the ability to gallop his way through the tackles with the ball in his hands. A highly consistent performer, he is one of 10 players in NCAA history to surpass the 1,000-yard rushing barrier in each of his four seasons.

**WEAKNESSES:** Will look to run out of bounds if presented the opportunity, rather than putting his head down and fighting for the extra yardage. His short stature and lack of size may attribute to that type of mentality. In his defense, he did manage to make strides in this department as a senior.

Has relied upon his agility too much at times and spends too much time dancing instead of capitalizing on his quickness and taking the yards that are given to him. His pre-snap stance is rather upright. Doesn't embrace the blocking role well and has limited experience playing on special teams. A rather durable player, he did miss two games due to injury during his career.

**Grade: 5.7**

### 11. JUSTICE HILL, Oklahoma State*

5-10, 190 40 time: 4.42 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** For his career, he totaled 3,539 rushing yards on 632 attempts, plus 304 receiving yards on 49 catches and 31 touchdowns in 36 games played. The Oklahoma State spread attack operated from a shotgun formation and featured a lot of RPO plays. Hills' top-speed acceleration and ability to make defenders miss make him a potential game-breaker capable of taking it the distance on any given play, and that's a high-ceiling skill that will intrigue NFL teams.

**STRENGTHS:** A strong back with great vision; has enough wiggle in the open field and breakaway speed to be considered a game changer. With a noticeably fit body and extreme lower leg strength (able to squat 565 pounds), he shows tremendous agility, along with a 40-inch vertical jump. Hill will also line up as a slot receiver on occasion and is solid in pass protection. Is at his finest when he hits top speed in the open field and flashes a fancy spin move. Has been praised for his toughness and ability to play through injuries. His big-play ability can alter the momentum of a game.

**WEAKNESSES:** Size would suggest that he'll need to bulk up for the next level. Can waste too much motion and energy before he even gets back to the line of scrimmage at times. He needs to focus on hitting the hole with authority and without hesitation on a consistent basis. Not an effective short-yardage runner, even when forced into goal line situations, he came up short on more than a few occasions. You wonder why the coaches used him in such a role but he shouldn't be relied upon in that capacity in the pros. NFL coaches will probably appreciate it if he tones down his social media accounts a tad.

**Grade: 5.4**

### 12. DEXTER WILLIAMS, Notre Dame

5-11, 215 40 time: 4.47 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The "Juice Man" served as a battering ram for the Fighting Irish last season after returning from a four-game suspension. No stranger to adversity, Williams has dealt with injuries, an arrest, suspension and the terminal illness of his mom.

He was the most impressive back in attendance at the Senior Bowl. While he struggled with a few drops during the week, he rebounded well with a collection of nice grabs out of the backfield. He finished with just 279 total touches for his career. Some would say that he lacks experience or question whether he can sustain being the workhorse for an extended period of time. Others would argue that it will extend his lifespan in the NFL. Williams could prove to be a Day 3 gem.

**STRENGTHS:** A hard-nosed runner who explodes through the hole, he possesses excellent cutback ability, burst and quickness. Brings the energy that sparked the Notre Dame offense with his speed and ability to break tackles; he can take it to the house on any given

play. Smooth runner in the open field and can make it seem effortless to outrun the defense. A fun-loving spirit who doesn't mind the camera and has been described to have contagious energy. His skill-set would place him in upper-echelon backs of this year's draft class in terms of pure talent.

**WEAKNESSES:** An arrest for possession of marijuana during a traffic stop was one of several incidents for Williams, who was suspended at the start of last season due to violation of team rules. He missed three games in 2017 due to injury. Demonstrates questionable hands with occasional drops, but in his defense, he makes up for it with positive plays in the pass game.

Served as a reserve the past three years and was often subbed out due to poor pass protection but he has made huge strides in that department this year. Immaturity has been a major issue for Williams in the past but head coach Brian Kelly has publicly stated that he has since taken ownership of his actions and has learned self-accountability.

**Grade: 5.4**

### 13. ELIJAH HOLYFIELD, Georgia*

5-10, 215 40 time: 4.52 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Move, get out the way! Holyfield is a bulldozer who loves to barrel over defenders with his tough, hard-nosed running style. He stayed after practice every day to catch 110 extra passes in an effort to become a better pass catcher. Likely a two-down back at the next level who can manage the brunt of the workload and should be a tremendous weapon inside the red zone. Elijah, of course, is the son of former boxing champion Evander Holyfield. He's also the real deal.

**STRENGTHS:** A big truck driver with a bruising running style, safeties are certainly forced to make a "business decision" when encountering Holyfield one-on-one in the open field. Not only can the rocked-up runner break tackles, but he also absorbs hits and will drag defenders along with him, enabling him to gain extra yardage after contact. He seemed to finally hit his stride during his junior campaign, demonstrating improved quickness and just enough wiggle to make defenders miss in the open field. Has also proven to be a capable blocker. Rarely ever fumbles.

**WEAKNESSES:** Speed is one area in which Holyfield won't be fooling anyone, but his style of running doesn't necessarily require it. Can he see, think and step through all the big bodies at the line of scrimmage? He had just seven career catches in three seasons, so he doesn't project to be much of a threat in the pass game. Needs to show better consistency in pass protection. Violent running style could be a detriment to his health over the long-term. Had a marijuana arrest during his sophomore year.

**Grade: 5.3**

### 14. BRYCE LOVE, Stanford

5-9, 202 40 time: 4.36 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Returning to school for his senior season earned Love a degree but cost him beaucoup bucks in the draft, as an injury-plagued senior season deterred his stock. Evaluators will need to determine how much risk/reward value there is for Love, who is a game-breaker when healthy but has been categorized as a medical red flag, especially after suffering a torn ACL in his final game at Stanford.

The aspiring pediatrician could be the luxury piece to help elevate an offense to the next level. Once considered to be a first-round pick, he's viewed more as a mid-round flyer at this point. The team who selects Love would be wise to "redshirt" him his rookie season and let him get healthy. This makes him a risky gamble but Love could pay out huge dividends for those who show patience.

**STRENGTHS:** One of the most exciting playmakers in college football when healthy, his electrifying speed, burst and vision enabled him to rush for 2,118 yards as a junior. Scouts love his patience, vision and instincts. He is most dangerous in the open field, which is where his elusiveness makes him a game-changer. His pass-catching prowess might be one of the most valuable aspects of his game. While Stanford was conservative utilizing him in that capacity, he made several nice plays as a receiver and set a career high with 20 catches as a senior. Was used as a kick returner early on during his Stanford career.

**WEAKNESSES:** A huge question mark in the durability department. Prior to the torn ACL suffered during the season finale, Love had dealt with injuries the entire season, including an undisclosed injury that was kept a mystery at the beginning of the season. He would also endure an ankle injury in 2018 and now bears a frequent flier card for his trips to the medical department. On the field, his lack of size is another concern. He has showed the propensity to bounce it to the outside and while he possesses the speed to do it, he'll need to prove that he can be a much more effective inside runner; he can get lost in the trash.

**Grade: 5.3**

### 15. KARAN HIGDON, Michigan

5-9, 202 40 time: 4.50 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The brash running back isn't one who lacks for confidence, as Higdon has provided the media with plenty of sound bites. He's the first Wolverines runner to surpass the 1,000-yard barrier in a single season since Fitzgerald Toussaint (2011). The Florida native has accomplished plenty off the field as well, as he was able to graduate in three years, has a 3-year old daughter and has started a non-profit group for underprivileged children. With just 471 career carries, there is plenty of thread left on his tires. A smash-and-dash type runner who should excel in a committee system.

**STRENGTHS:** A north-south runner, his vision and patience — along with his ability to pick up chunks of yardage after contact — are his greatest strengths. Does an excellent job of running low to the ground and, at his size, is able to shield himself behind his fellow linemen. Does an effective job getting in the way of pass-rushers and stepping up to make the block. Was named a team captain for last season and seemed to thrive playing in a zone scheme.

**WEAKNESSES:** A noted downhill runner, Higdon doesn't own blazing game speed or a whole lot of shiftiness — he had just one carry for more than 50-plus yards last season on 224 attempts. He was not used much as a receiving option out of the backfield, and his poor pass blocking makes him unlikely to play a third-down role in the NFL.

**Grade: 5.2**

### 16. JALIN MOORE, Appalachian State

5-10, 207 40 time: 4.44 5th-6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The Mountaineers team captain received a Senior Bowl invite, despite suffering a broken right ankle back in October. Coming off back-to-back 1,000 yard rushing seasons, expectations were high for Moore entering his final year. Interestingly enough, he was never the featured back during his playing career, dating back to high school, where he was part of a time-share committee.

Known to be a freak athlete and was anticipated to have some of the best measureables at the Combine. However, due to his status, Moore now becomes a valuable mid- to late-round commodity, as a player worth bringing along slowly in his first pro season in hopes of stashing a future starting running back.

**STRENGTHS:** A strong, compact, downhill runner who possesses great vision and runs with excellent pad level, Moore constantly keeps his legs churning and embraces contact by lowering the shoulder boom. He consistently keeps his body momentum falling forward, which allows him to push the pile and gain additional yards. He has proven to be a workhorse back that can pound the rock between the tackles and wear down defenses but also displays the burst to cut it outside on the edge.

Can squat 650 pounds and clean 350, in addition to being able to broad jump 11 feet, 1 inch, along with a 38.5-inch vertical. He has been timed at 4.37 seconds in the 40-yard dash prior to injury — his average 40 time and broad jump mark likely would have ranked high — perhaps first — among all running backs invited to the Combine. High-character player.

**WEAKNESSES:** Catching the ball out of the backfield is an area in which he has made strides but has room for growth; he had 12 receptions for 163 yards as a junior after totaling just five catches for 32 yards during his first two seasons. Would like to see him break more arm tackles and increase his yards after contact. He has made a conscience effort to become a more patient runner, in order to allow his blocks to set up and create running lanes.

NFL scouts will want to see his acceleration translate into more breakaway plays, as his longest career runs each season have gone for 58, 63 and 55 yards. Suffered several nagging injuries during his 2017 campaign, including injuries to each foot, an ankle, bruised hip and back, which caused him to miss two games. A fractured, dislocated right ankle, ended his Mountaineers playing career.

**Grade: 5.1**

### 17. MILES SANDERS, Penn State*

5-11, 215 40 time: 4.56 5th-6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Following in the legacy of Saquan Barkley would be a daunting task for any player but Sanders stepped right in and did quite admirably. With just 64 career touches entering 2018, Sanders decided to declare for the draft early after a sensational junior campaign, running for 1,274 yards while averaging nearly six yards per carry. A north-south runner who projects as a rotational back at the next level.

**STRENGTHS:** He has bulked up 20 pounds since his arrival in Happy Valley, which has translated to making him a more powerful runner. He definitely earned his stripes with his ability to hit the hole hard, lower the shoulder boom and keep fighting for the tough yardage. Called a student of the game by head coach James Franklin.

**WEAKNESSES:** Primarily a return man during his first two seasons, Sanders struggled with fumbling issues early on in his career. He'll need to earn the trust of coaches at the next level before they hand him a considerable workload. While he managed to nab 24 balls for 139 receiving yards, you would like to see him be able to do more with the ball in his hands after the catch.

**Grade: 5.1**

### 18. LJ SCOTT, Michigan State

6-0, 225 40 time: 4.62 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** After leading the Spartans in rushing in each of his first three seasons, Scott hit a roadblock in 2018 due to nagging ankle and hamstring injury woes. He was forced to bow out of the Senior Bowl due to the ankle injury after being limited to just five games in the 2018 season. After a disappointing senior

season, his draft stock has fallen so low, that he is now viewed as a Day 3 bargain with upside. His skill-set could carve out a role for him as a third-down specialist at the next level.

**STRENGTHS:** A power back with bulky size and big upper body, which makes it difficult to tackle him. Possesses one gear — forward. The more you feed him, the more he wears down opposing defenses; the fourth quarter is where you reap the reward. His body was custom-made to play in a ground-and-pound offensive attack. A reliable receiver and outstanding blocker, which is a prerequisite to play for Michigan State head coach Mark Dantonio.

**WEAKNESSES:** Unfortunately for Scott, you can't teach athleticism. He shows little wiggle in his game and can be slow to accelerate. A leg injury (hamstring) hampered Scott throughout much of last season, which is concerning due to the fact that his length and somewhat upright running style would seem to make him susceptible to leg injuries. When healthy, he has been a streaky performer.

Grade: 5.0

### 19. JORDAN SCARLETT, Florida*

5-10, 210 40 time: 4.58 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** He displays great burst and strength, thriving as a third-down specialist. He has experience playing in a pro style and spread offense. Scarlett is a great athlete who tests well, as he's able to bench press 465 pounds, but his off-field indiscretions will certainly cost him. However, he can go from zero-to-60 in the blink of an eye and should find a home in the NFL as a complementary back.

**STRENGTHS:** Has excellent vision and patience, allowing his blocks to set up. He doesn't shy away from tacklers; shows the ability to lower the shoulder boom, break arm tackles and gain yards after contact. His footwork allows him to tip-toe through the trash and he is decisive when he sees the opportunity to turn the corner. His change of direction and balance allow him to constantly go forward.

**WEAKNESSES:** Has been caught from behind due to his lack of speed. And there are off-field concerns. He has been in hot water with the law and was suspended for the 2017 season due to a credit card fraud scam. Scarlett was also suspended for the team's bowl game during his freshman season, stemming from a marijuana arrest.

Grade: 5.0

### 20. RYQUELL ARMSTEAD, Temple

5-11, 215 40 time: 4.56 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The Owls called upon Armstead on plenty of occasions to help carry them to victory, and he has been a staple of consistency when healthy. He shows the traits to be an effective pro due to his toughness and well-rounded skill-set, as he can also catch and block. Scouts will want to view his 2016 and 2018 game film in order to get to know the real Armstead.

**STRENGTHS:** His combination of run, catch, block abilities, along with his great vision, makes him a very valuable commodity at the next level. Those who have studied Armstead frequently over the past four years know he has always possessed tremendous vision and great patience toting the rock. He has finally regained his vintage explosiveness that we saw early on in his career after a turf toe robbed him of his ability to cutback and explode in 2017.

**WEAKNESSES:** Limited athleticism caps his ability to break long runs. Has not been reliable in pass protection and was pretty much a non-factor as a receiver out of the backfield. He has battled through some nagging injuries throughout his career but never sees to miss time as he is tough as nails.

Grade: 5.0

## 3 TO WATCH

### SLEEPER

**Rodney Anderson, Oklahoma**
Injuries robbed him parts of three seasons but when healthy, Anderson proved to showcase an overall skill-set that is as good as any back in this class.

### COULD DISAPPOINT

**Darrell Henderson, Memphis**
More of a finesse runner, it remains to be seen just how effective Henderson can be between the tackles at the next level.

### SMALL SCHOOL STUD

**Wes Hills, Slippery Rock**
Don't be deceived by the small-school name, Hills possesses big-time game with his multi-faceted ability, which he proved at the Senior Bowl.

### 21. TY JOHNSON, Maryland

5-10, 213 40 time: 4.48 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** An explosive runner, Johnson shows excellent vision and can hit the hole between the tackles, but he also possesses the acceleration to cut it to the outside. A multi-purpose prospect who can also be a receiving threat and return weapon, Johnson is one of the best running back prospects no one seems to be talking about leading up to the draft. He projects as a change-of-pace back at the next level, with the ability to return kicks. Using him in spurts seems to be the most effective way to maximize his effectiveness.

**STRENGTHS:** Johnson shows excellent vision and can hit the hole between the tackles but also has the acceleration to cut it to the outside, making him a tough runner to defend. A smaller, change-of-pace back with some upper-body strength, which allows him to break arm tackles and gain additional yards after contact. He can hit the hole between the tackles but also has the speed to cut it to the outside. Possesses great acceleration and patience, quick burst and top-end speed. A return specialist who averaged more 26 yards per kick return for his career, including a 100-yard return in 2017.

**WEAKNESSES:** There were questions surrounding Johnson's maturity when he was an underclassman. Former head coach DJ Durkin said that his mental approach changed entering his junior campaign, as he took a more professional attitude in practice. Flashed good hands coming out of the backfield during the week of East-West Shrine Game practices but wasn't nearly utilized enough in that aspect during his Terrapins career.

Grade: 5.0

### 22. NICK BROSSETTE, LSU

5-11, 217 40 time: 4.58 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** With just one career start and 306 career rushing yards entering his senior season, not much was expected of Brossette, who emerged as the Tigers workhorse back. A dominant player who was highly recruited coming out of high school and never quite lived up to expectations. He can be used as a multi-purpose back due to his ability to run, catch and block. A jack-of-all-trades, master of none, Brossette can carve out a nice role out for himself as a valuable backup at the next level.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses a compact frame, runs low to the ground and was utilized out of the slot during red zone drills at the East-West Shrine Game. He was able to pound the rock between the tackles with his patient running style, as he allows for his blocks to develop. His work ethic and emergence has been a long time in the making.

**WEAKNESSES:** His timed speed remains the one glaring knock and could ultimately determine whether or not he is drafted. Brossette endured some major adversity during his freshman season when his older brother passed away due to a seizure and heart attack. Brossette would later tear his ACL that same season.

Grade: 5.0

### 23. WES HILLS, Slippery Rock

6-1, 218 40 time: 4.59 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The New Jersey native was a little-known recruit from a small high school but played bigger than most during the all-star circuit. He entered the NFLPA Collegiate Bowl as a blip on the radar but left such a strong impression after being named MVP of the event that he was then called up to the Senior Bowl a week later, where he continued to put on a show. The Division-II product owns an intriguing blend of size and speed.

**STRENGTHS:** A strider who showed some nice wiggle in all-star game practices, with several change-of-direction cuts and a very impressive spin move. Possesses a stout upper body and does a nice job catching the ball out of the backfield. Showcased his ability to run between the tackles or cut it outside and break a big run. He can steamroll over would-be tacklers and has barreled over a handful of defenders on film. A three-sport athlete in high school who holds several track and field records.

**WEAKNESSES:** Playing at the D-II ranks, his level of competition will be called into question, although it didn't seem to be a problem on the all-star circuit. With such a long frame, you would like to see him run lower to the ground. Battled nagging injuries this past year, missing two games and parts of three others but still managed to finish with 1,907 all-purpose yards.

Grade: 5.0

## WORTH WATCHING

**Alec Ingold, Wisconsin (6-1, 242)**
A true Swiss army knife at fullback; possesses great blocking ability, along with excellent athleticism.

**Travis Homer, Miami (5-10, 205)***
Flashes lightning-quick change of direction and acceleration, in addition to breakaway speed.

**Damarea Crockett, Missouri (5-10, 225)**
Shows good bounce and ability to run between the tackles, but must prove he can hold onto the ball.

**Darwin Thompson, Utah State (5-8, 200, 4.57)**
Elusive runner who blends strength and speed, plus can make defenders miss in the open field

**Devine Ozigbo, Nebraska (5-11, 235)**
A tremendous runner after contact; shows strong catching/blocking skills; projects as a third-down back.

*For further analysis of the 2019 running backs, visit www.nfldraftscout.com.*

# Wide Receivers

**OVERVIEW** There has been a total of five wideouts chosen in the first round during the last two drafts, but don't be surprised to see this year's class match that total.

Oklahoma speedster Marquise Brown is a dynamo in the mold of DeSean Jackson and adds an extra element of being able to stretch the field in any offense.

There are plenty of big-bodies, such as Mississippi's D.K. Metcalf, Arizona State's N'Keal Harry and North Carolina State's Kelvin Harmon. Playmakers such as A.J. Brown of Ole Miss and Parris Campbell of Ohio State can take it to the house on any given play. Additional wideouts worth keeping an eye on include Lil'Jordan Humphrey of Texas and Greg Dortch of Wake Forest. While completely different kind of players, both have a knack for finding the end zone.

There is every kind of flavor in this wide receiver class.

But beware: The wide receiver position has become one of the most difficult positions to evaluate as college offenses have predominantly shifted to spread attacks and an up-tempo style of play, and production on Saturday doesn't always translate to production on Sunday.

With 19 underclassmen receivers available, look for them to dominate the draft early and often.

**2019 CLASS GRADE**
**B+**

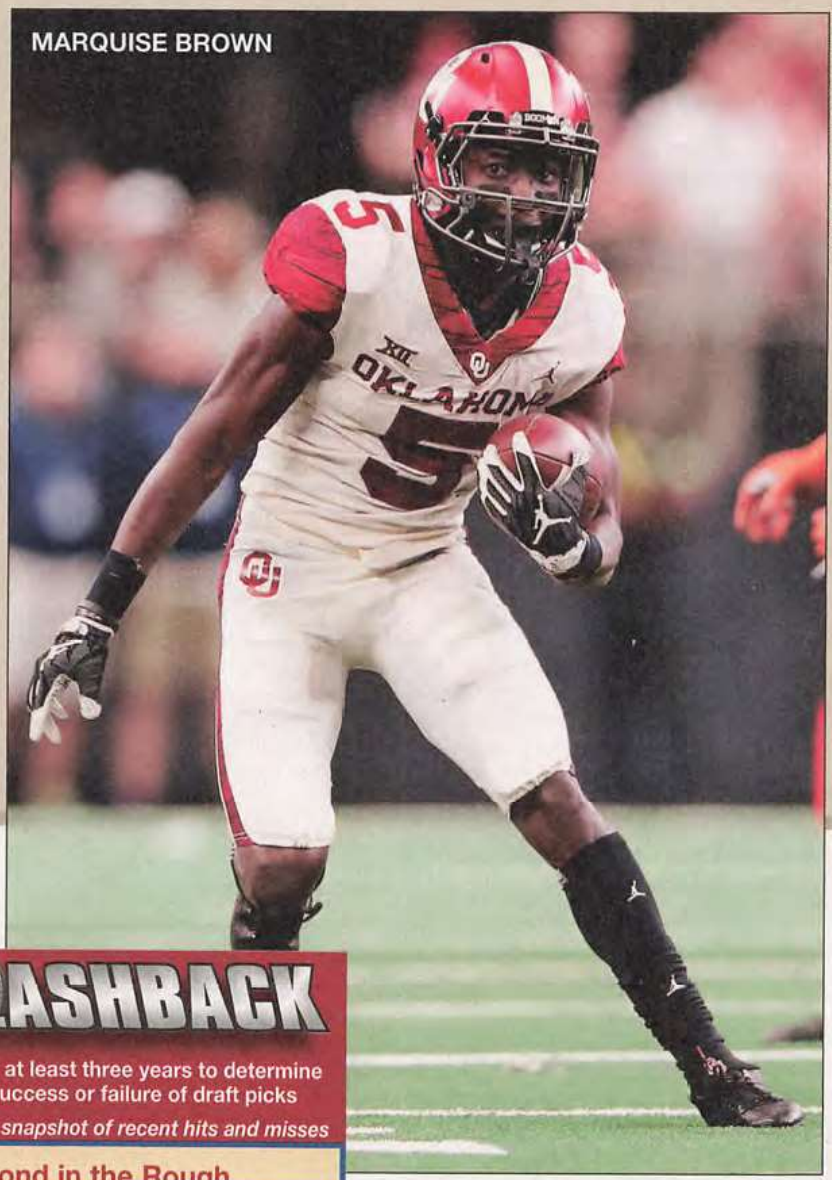


PHOTO BY KEVIN JAIRAJ-USA TODAY SPORTS

*Denotes underclassman

### 1. MARQUISE BROWN, Oklahoma*

5-10, 162 40 time: 4.32 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The man they call "Hollywood" is clearly ready for the big time with his elite top-end speed and outstanding ball skills.

The younger cousin of the Steelers' Antonio Brown, Marquise was a four-star junior college prospect from College of the Canyons, where he led the team with 50 receptions for 754 yards and 10 touchdowns. He also returned 13 kickoffs for 402 yards and a touchdown and returned nine punts for 182 yards and a touchdown as a freshman.

In only two seasons at Oklahoma, he racked up 2,413 receiving yards and 17 touchdowns with an average of 18.3 yards per catch. Brown was an All-American as a junior and finished his collegiate career as one of the most feared deep threats in the game.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses rare speed, outstanding lateral explosion and excellent vision as a runner after the catch. He is able to stop and start from zero to 60 mph like a sports car. Capable of running away from any defender and, despite his diminutive size, he is very difficult to tackle because of his great sense of balance and instincts as a runner.

He really elevated his game last season; became a more polished receiver, expanding his route tree and became a more dangerous threat underneath in the passing attack, while showcasing his ability to make defenders miss in the open field.

A four-down player with special teams experience as an ace kick returner, he'll make an impact in the running game on end arounds and jet sweeps. Creative runner that has moves on top of moves; a very twitchy athlete who will be a difficult one-on-one cover.

**WEAKNESSES:** Owns a very slight build and has less than ideal height. While his ball skills are solid, he does not have large hands and has had some lapses in concentration. He has difficulties in 50-50 ball situations and jump-ball scenarios due to his lack of bulk and height, but he has strong enough hands to win battles. His ability to beat press coverage against more physical corners was not consistent and his lack of size is

## FLASHBACK

It takes at least three years to determine the success or failure of draft picks

*Here's a snapshot of recent hits and misses*

### Diamond in the Rough

**Tyreek Hill, Chiefs (Fifth round, 2016)**
Flagged for character leading up to the draft, the Chiefs took a flier on Hill, who has emerged as the top deep threat in the NFL due to his unparalleled speed.

### Swing and Miss

**Corey Coleman, Browns (First round, 2016)**
After suiting up for four teams in a three-year span, Coleman appears to be running out of chances as a first-round bust.

### Breakout Player

**Calvin Ridley, Falcons (First round, 2018)**
Scoring 10 touchdowns as a rookie, the future seems bright for Ridley in Atlanta playing second fiddle to Julio Jones.

## PROTOTYPE

### Release
**Marquise Brown, Oklahoma**
No wideout has more burst and acceleration off the line of scrimmage than Brown; give him a slither and he can take it the distance.

### Route Running
**Deebo Samuel, South Carolina**
Samuel pairs sound footwork with clean, sharp cuts to create short-area separation with his technique.

### Hands
**N'Keal Harry, Arizona State**
Imposing size as a dependable go-to receiver with sticky hands to catch nearly every ball thrown in his direction.

### After the Catch
**A.J. Brown, Mississippi**
His ability to pick up additional yards after the catch is due to his great vision, patience and willingness to follow his blocks.

### Blocking
**Kelvin Harmon, NC State**
A big, physical wideout who takes pride in his craft, Harmon is an aggressive blocker capable of moving defenders out of the way.

### Intangibles
**Terry McLaurin, Ohio State**
It wouldn't be surprising to see McLaurin go on to become a coach after what projects as a long, successful career due to his smarts and awareness.

concerning, especially escaping jams and more physical corners early in routes.

**NFL COMPARISON:** DeSean Jackson, Tampa Bay Buccaneers — There are some eerie similarities, such as size, the ability to get a clean release, the ability to separate from defenders at an instant and, of course, the game-breaking speed.

**Grade: 8.3**

### 2. D.K. METCALF, Mississippi*
6-3, 225, 40 time: 4.54 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The redshirt sophomore is an impressive size/speed specimen. He scored a touchdown in each of his first two collegiate games but broke his foot and was awarded a medical hardship as a freshman. Metcalf enjoyed a fine 2017 season and had a strong start to his redshirt sophomore year, but then played in just seven games before suffering a neck injury that required surgery.

The upside remains immense, especially as a red zone target, because receivers with the kind of raw talent that Metcalf possesses only come around once in a blue moon.

**STRENGTHS:** Physically imposing, he has a ripped-up physique and, despite his 225-pound frame, flashes rare speed for a wideout his size. He has the height and thick frame to dominate in jump-ball situations, as he is very effective at high pointing the ball. A load to take down in the open field because of his size, but with his long strides, he is difficult to catch if he gets a step.

He really gets after it as a blocker in the run game and does a good job of sticking with his assignment. He has received medical clearance for physical activity after surgery, per doctors. Also boasts rich NFL bloodlines with his grandfather (Terry), father (Terrence) and uncle (Eric) all enjoying long careers at the next level.

**WEAKNESSES:** He is not spatially aware in regard to the sidelines and hashes at times. Not as polished of a route runner as his Ole Miss teammates (A.J. Brown and Damarkus Lodge), although he has more upside. He is a strong runner after the catch, but he won't make many defenders miss and his change of direction is only average at best. Needs to locate the ball better and improve on his contested catches at the next level because his role will be as a possession man. His 2018 neck injury will likely be a medical red flag for many teams.

**NFL COMPARISION:** A.J. Green, Cincinnati Bengals — It might take a year or two to get there, but Metcalf could transition into being a great one with the skill-set he has.

**Grade: 8.2**

### 3. N'KEAL HARRY, Arizona State*
6-3, 213 40 time: 4.56 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Harry was a highly touted prep prospect from the Phoenix area who ended up leading the Sun Devils in receiving touchdowns during all three seasons of his collegiate career, finishing with 22 scores. He is an early entry who has a chance to be the first receiver off the board because of his ability to make highlight-reel catches and jaw dropping open-field moves at his size.

A Pac-12 all-conference performer since his sophomore season, he continued to improve his craft and appeared to take the next step as a junior. Harry profiles as an outside receiver that will develop into a starter by Year 2, but he will make an impact early thanks to his athleticism and vertical ability.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses ideal size and height, as well as a filled-out frame. Part of the reason he is so effective after the catch is the power and strength he has as a runner. Appears to be chiseled from a slab of marble and clearly took the weight room seriously in Tempe. He wins easily in jump-ball situations and dominates in 50-50 scenarios thanks to outstanding leaping ability and excellent concentration, which shows in some of his remarkable one-handed grabs.

Appears to locate the ball with ease and is sure-handed as a runner. Strong hands and strength in traffic is where he could be special; he comes away with contested passes and aggressively fights corners in close quarters. His route tree consists of various short-to-intermediate routes but he can also win deep if given time to gather his speed.

**WEAKNESSES:** While Harry is a freakish athlete, this

PHOTO BY AP PHOTO/MATT YORK

does not translate into his route-running, as of yet. He has a tendency to round off his routes; understanding the finer nuances or selling his breaks isn't part of his arsenal at the moment. Will allow passes into his body at times and isn't a consistent hands catcher.

He can struggle changing directions; as explosive as he is in a straight line, he isn't laterally dynamic. Lacks a third gear to break away from defenders and possesses more build-up speed than anything. Should be a red-zone weapon, but it didn't always work out that way at Arizona State.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Demaryius Thomas, Denver Broncos — A raw physically gifted player that possesses all the athleticism needed to be a difference-making receiver at the next level.

**Grade: 8.1**

### 4. A.J. BROWN, Mississippi*

6-1, 230 40 time: 4.58 1st-2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Brown arrived in Oxford as one of the highest-rated high school prospects from Mississippi and will leave as the program's all-time leader in receiving yards (2,984). He was an All-America selection the past two seasons, but also benefited from playing alongside receivers like D.K. Metcalf, Damarkus Lodge and tight end Dawson Knox.

Brown is a thick-built, fluid mover that changes directions easily for his size. He played a lot of slot during his time at Ole Miss, but he can line up at any receiver position at the next level and profiles as an instant starter thanks to his footwork, ball skills and spatial awareness as a player. No matter where he lines up in an NFL offense, he'll be an easy bet to succeed.

**STRENGTHS:** A confident runner after the catch, he has a number of routes in his arsenal and possesses tremendous feet. Appears to have quality vision as a ball-carrier and is creative after the catch, setting up his moves nicely and utilizing his blockers well. He does a good job of timing his breaks and altering his stride before making his move.

Possesses the ability to play games with cornerbacks because of basketball-style releases and ball skills are elite, with big mitts and strength in his hands. He really does a phenomenal job of locating the football and is a reliable pass-catcher.

**WEAKNESSES:** Demonstrates inconsistent effort on running plays as a blocker, opting to run his man out, as opposed to driving him out in most instances. Can be a bystander when his number is not called and even though he is listed at 230, he does not block like it. Lacks the gear needed to kill defenses deep as a vertical threat. A smooth mover, as opposed to being an explosive ball-carrier — his lack of suddenness shows up when he's trying to separate from defenders.

**NFL comparison:** Keenan Allen, Los Angeles Chargers — A polished receiver capable of playing in the slot or outside that wins with physicality, savvy and craftiness. He might also remind you of Anquan Boldin.

**Grade: 8.0**

### 5. KELVIN HARMON, NC State*

6-3, 214 40 time: 4.59 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A big play waiting to happen, as nearly one-third of Harmon's receptions in college went for 20-plus yards. The New Jersey native was originally born in Liberia before moving to the United States when he was 4. He enjoyed two ACC all-conference, 1,000-yard seasons at NC State and declared early for the draft.

Harmon is a big-bodied receiver who uses his size and length very well, shielding the ball away from defenders and leveraging corners off in the running game.

PHOTO BY MARK KONEZNY-USA TODAY SPORTS

Harmon plays a physical brand of ball and he profiles as a starter with his height, leaping ability and strength after the catch.

**STRENGTHS:** The lanky wideout is productive on back-shoulder throws and high-pointing balls because of his outstanding body control, coupled with his tremendous ball skills. He locates the football easily and is as reliable as possible when it comes to adjusting to the ball in the air. Appears to enjoy run blocking, given the attitude and energy he puts into that part of his craft.

He understands how to get into a defender, turn him around and wall him off to the outside. He does a good job on contested catches and possesses strong hands to fight off cornerbacks. He's difficult to press because of his strength and running power.

**WEAKNESSES:** Does a poor job diagnosing the opposing secondary and finding the holes in coverage. He also lacks suddenness in and out of his breaks. While a very strong runner after the catch, he doesn't have an arsenal of moves and lacks creativity with the ball in his hands. His routes need cleaning up, and Harmon appears to labor when changing directions, so not only is his top-end speed a concern but exactly what kind of movement he has in space is also a question mark.

**Grade: 7.9**

### 6. PARRIS CAMPBELL, Ohio State

6-1, 208 40 time: 4.36 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Campbell has game-changing speed, running as fast as a 10.3 100-meter dash in high school. He arrived in Columbus as a track star, switched to football, and he left as one of the more dynamic players on the team. Campbell was a Big Ten all-conference selection the last three years, filling the Percy Harvin/Curtis Samuel role for head coach Urban Meyer.

He's one of those rare athletes that is a real space-mover with terrific instincts as a ball-carrier and excellent anticipation in terms of setting up defenders for moves. A well-respected team leader, Campbell was voted a captain and is a player opposing defenses must account for based off the threat he brings as a runner.

**STRENGTHS:** Faster than a jackrabbit on a date, he ran away from the entire Michigan defense for 192 receiving yards. His straight-line speed is flat out electric, and his test results reflect that. He is capable of stringing moves together after the catch and despite his limited route tree, his 9 route is as dangerous as it gets thanks to his super clean release.

His change of direction is elite, and he can create pursuit angles with his acceleration that are unattainable for defenders to close on in space. Capable of executing precise jump cuts and dynamic juke moves with the lateral explosion he possesses at his disposal. Has experience as a returner.

**WEAKNESSES:** There is little-to-no polish to his route running at this point and his arsenal is mostly limited to fly routes, bubbles, jets and end arounds. He is a player that needed his senior year. While he compiled num-

bers, he is more of a gadget-type player who still needs to define his role at the next level and might be pigeonholed as a special teamer. A bit of a one-trick pony; he's not physical at the catch point and his ball skills are also suspect. He improved in that area, but he's just not consistent despite being hyper-competitive.

**Grade: 7.8**

### 7. JJ ARCEGA-WHITESIDE, Stanford*

6-3, 222 40 time: 4.62 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Arcega-Whiteside is a huge mismatch receiver with outstanding height, a wide body and long frame. Born in Spain, he is the son of professional basketball players overseas, and the family moved to South Carolina when J.J. was 6 years old. A three-sport athlete as a prep, Arcega-Whiteside ended up as an all-conference player in the Pac-12 in the last two seasons.

He developed into a locker-room leader and was voted a team captain in 2018. He left a year of eligibility on the table after a season that saw him go for 1,000-plus receiving yards and 14 touchdowns. While perhaps lacking top straight-line speed, Arcega-Whiteside intrigues with his terrific quickness and body control to go along with the height and physicality that has always made him such a weapon on jump balls.

**STRENGTHS:** Built like a tank and could likely pass as a faux tight end based on height and bulk. He is at his best high-pointing footballs, beating up on shorter defenders, using his wide shoulders and dominating in contested situations. He is strong in the red zone and excels in 50-50 scenarios because he attacks the football in the air, as opposed to letting it into his body. He's a natural hands catcher who locates the ball easily, uses his basketball background to box out defenders at the catch point and pluck the football out of the air with his big hands.

**WEAKNESSES:** A little high-hipped and appears to be a one-speed athlete who doesn't separate and labors off the line from out of his stance. Shows clear limitations with his top-end speed and ability to change directions. A majority of his receptions were on contested passes because he couldn't separate. Not a threat after the catch with little suddenness. Most of his experience is at outside receiver, but he might not have the speed to survive on the perimeter.

**Grade: 7.7**

### 8. DEEBO SAMUEL, South Carolina

6-0, 210 40 time: 4.52 2nd-3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Samuel redshirted his first season in Columbia and missed seven games in 2015 because of a hamstring injury. He led the team in receiving in 2016 but missed three games to another hamstring issue. He was on a record pace early in his junior season, but he broke his left leg during the third game of the season.

Despite playing only one full season, Samuel racked up 2,076 receiving yards and 23 touchdowns from scrimmage, plus four more scores as a kick returner. Deebo topped it all off in Mobile, putting on a show at the Senior Bowl during the week of practices and in the game, which cemented his status as one of the top receivers in this class.

**STRENGTHS:** A twitched-up athlete who is very sudden and extremely quick in and out of his breaks. The threat he brings as a runner is special, as he's capable of stringing moves together, as well as running around would-be tacklers. He brings added value on special teams as an ace kick returner and he has a clear gift when he turns into a ball-carrier with how well he sees the field.

He has the ability to separate from any defender because of his jets, but also understands how to use his route running to set defenders up for failure. While his injury woes may have forced him to stay for his senior year, that extra season clearly helped him refine his craft. At the Senior Bowl, he demonstrated crisp route running, fluid change of direction, dependable hands and speed. One on day of practice, he made a double move against Temple cornerback Rock Ya-Sin, adjusted to the ball, stopped and leaped toward the sideline for a diving catch of about 35 yards.

**WEAKNESSES:** Doesn't possess ideal height and his ability to hold up to contact at the pro level will be a concern. He has struggled with more physical corners that get into his body; has had difficulties beating press coverage and winning jump-ball situations. His injury history will follow him; despite playing a full season as a senior, his hamstring woes and broken fibula will be a focus for evaluators when the medical comes up. There are doubts he can survive on the outside as a perimeter receiver because of his lack of height.

**Grade: 7.5**

### 9. LIL'JORDAN HUMPHREY, Texas*

6-4, 222 40 time: 4.52 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Humphrey's movement skills at his weight are very impressive, and that's why he was used as an all-purpose weapon for the Longhorns. He recorded a touchdown passing, rushing and receiving in the 2018 season because of his effectiveness with the ball in his hands. Humphrey was used out of the slot and as a runner in the backfield, as well as on end arounds. While he is more of a gadget-type of receiver, his talent as a ball-carrier can't be ignored.

**STRENGTHS:** Has a well-developed body with a strong lower half and running power that shows up when he gets the football in his hands. He gives good effort as a blocker in the running game, on screens and really sticks with his assignment. He brings one-year experience as a kick returner. Has great body control on high-point passes and does a good job of coming away with contested catches. Teams looking for a big slot will like him most.

**WEAKNESSES:** More of a work in progress as a route runner and could help himself by using his hands a little more to shed corners. Can struggle with concentration and has drops at times because he's a body catcher. Still has a long way to go in order to become a complete receiver, having only played as a slot for less than two years. He had a couple of suspensions at Texas for violation of team rules.

**Grade: 7.4**

### 10. RILEY RIDLEY, Georgia*

6-2, 200 40 time: 4.59 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Ridley is the younger brother of Falcons 2018 first-round draft pick Calvin Ridley and actually went to Georgia on his brother's advice. While he arrived in Athens with a lot of hype, he backed it up on the field with a touchdown in his first collegiate game against Tennessee.

His career production won't jump off the page because of all the talent on the Bulldogs roster, but his nine touchdowns as a junior are evidence of how effective he can be in the red zone or short yardage. Ridley could be a regular starter at some point during

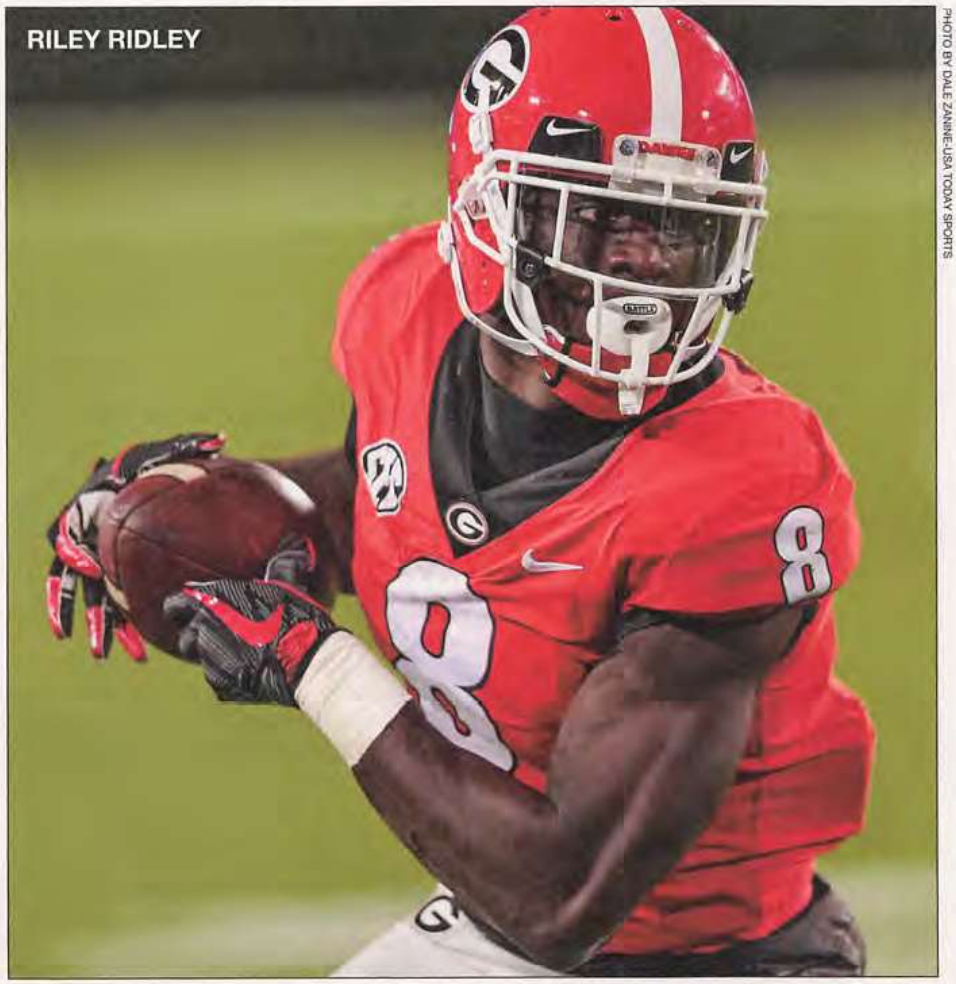


PHOTO BY DALE ZANINE-USA TODAY SPORTS

his rookie year because he already runs a handful of routes well and he understands how to find the holes in coverage.

**STRENGTHS:** Has strong hands and wins consistently in contested catch situations because of his thick frame and long arms. He is adept at diagnosing coverages and finding the holes in a defense, and he is usually aware of the first-down markers and where he is in relation to the sidelines or back of the end zone. Has enjoyed some of his best games against top-level competition (see Alabama, Texas) and despite his lack of yardage, he profiles as a chain-moving receiver.

**WEAKNESSES:** While he has quality ball skills, he can struggle with concentration drops at times. A willing blocker, but his technique needs work. He does not do a good job of lining blocks up or sizing up defenders. Off the field, he had an arrest for marijuana in March of 2017, and his medical evaluations could be of concern with ankle surgery that same year. His release off the line of scrimmage was adequate in college, but how well he'll be able to separate at the next level will be a big concern for a player that doesn't appear to be uber explosive.

**Grade: 7.3**

### 11. HAKEEM BUTLER, Iowa State*

6-6, 225 40 time: 4.58 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Butler is a super long receiver who poses a mismatch all over the field with his height and excellent hands.

The physically-imposing Butler entered the 2018 season already on scouts' radar after earning honorable mention All-Big 12 honors in 2017 opposite Allen Lazard, the school's all-time leading receiver and now a member of the Jacksonville Jaguars. Butler took his talents to the next level in 2018, proving to be a perimeter receiver who can win in jump-ball situations and does a great job on back-shoulder throws because he's so good at contorting his body and adjusting to the ball in the air.

A mature team leader, Butler is highly motivated and ultra competitive with a physical playing style, boxing out defenders with his wide body.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses tremendous body control, outstanding balance and he has such strong hands that he can make plays even with defenders hanging off him. Has a rare catch radius with his prototype height and long arms, but he also uses his body so well, like a natural small forward type of basketball athlete grabbing a rebound. That makes sense as a comparison, because Butler is first cousins with Aaron and Andrew Harrison (NBA/Euro League) and lived with the Harrison family in the Houston area for a period after losing his mother to cancer in 2012.

The 2018 All-Big 12 wideout runs hard even if the play isn't for him; he clears out when he's supposed to and shows consistent effort as a run blocker. He does a good job of toeing the sideline, recognizing the line to gain and knowing where he is on the field.

**WEAKNESSES:** Top-end speed is suspect and he's not sudden when he changes directions. He times up his breaks well, but he tends to round off his cuts. While he gives consistent effort in the running game, he does struggle to strike moving targets as a blocker. He has had some lapses in concentration with drops (see Iowa, Kansas State in 2018). Butler lacks the quick-twitch burst to immediately separate from defenders, so his ability to beat press coverage at the next level will be a question mark. He is not gifted after the catch, even though he has a tenacious running style.

**Grade: 7.2**

### 12. GREG DORTCH, Wake Forest*

5-9, 170 40 time: 4.36 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Dortch is a tweaked-up speed receiver who is a dynamic return man and very difficult to cover out of the slot in spread formations. He redshirted in his first year, but then earned ACC all-conference accolades in each of the past two seasons, opting to declare early with two years of eligibility remaining. His career production is ridiculous, as Dortch was able to compile more than 3,000 all-purpose yards and 19 total touchdowns in just 20 career games. He eats up yardage in chunks like Pac-Man and despite his lack of prototypical size, he makes up for it with rare speed and movement skills.

**STRENGTHS:** Showcases a super clean release, is outstanding at varying his gate and stride to set defenders up for the after-burners, but when he puts it in third gear there are few corners that can keep pace. He is dangerous as a runner with his ability to string moves together and if he gets a step, he can go the distance. His ball skills are stellar, as he possesses great hand-eye coordination and his ability to stop and start is frustrating in coverage. Was a valued return man for the Demon Deacons, handling both kicks and punts on special teams.

**WEAKNESSES:** Listed at just 170 pounds, his ability to hold up to the rigors of the pro game will be a major concern, especially after missing the last four games of his redshirt freshman season with a punctured intestine from a pylon in the Louisville game. While he has quality ball skills, his playing strength and ball security are suspect and his ability to fight for contested passes is only adequate at best. He doesn't sell all his routes and could do a better of running hard on plays not called for him.

**Grade: 7.1**

### 13. ANDY ISABELLA, Massachusetts

5-9, 186 40 time: 4.38 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** An undersized speed receiver, Isabella is a deep threat with legitimate wheels and rare acceleration that defenses have to respect. UMass was one of his few offers out of high school and despite his lack of hype, he ended up re-writing the school record books in receiving yards and touchdowns, on his way to becoming an All-American.

This kid is dedicated to his craft and his elite speed really showed up during the week of practices at the Senior Bowl when he started flying around the football field. He has proven to be more than a slot option with his jets and rare separation skills.

**STRENGTHS:** A fluid mover that creates separation with ease on defenders and can flat-out run away from anybody. His game is built on change of direction and stopping/starting to use his acceleration to his advantage. He stepped up in games against ranked competitors like Georgia in 2018 and Mississippi State in 2017.

He has plus ball-skills as he is a hands-catcher

# SPOTLIGHT

## Andy Isabella, UMass

***What's the fastest you've ever been timed in the 40-yard dash?*** I ran one electric-timed 40 in high school at the start of camp; it was 4.39. But the last 40 I ran was at the Air Force Academy and I ran 4.26 hand time.

***When did you realize that you had a chance to play football professionally?*** To be honest, probably back to my sophomore year. My first start against the Florida Gators and I had a 53-yard catch at the end of the first quarter. After the game, I had three catches for 94 yards. I only played like 15 snaps because I was only playing out of the slot, but after the game, a lot of the guys were coming up to me congratulating me.

***What does it take to be a great slot receiver?*** You have to have a good feel; you have to be very smart; you have to see who's in front of you and see who's around you. You have to have a good feel for what's going on every play.

***Who is the toughest opponent you have faced during your career?*** Deandre Baker from Georgia, a great player and a really good kid. I got to meet him in Atlanta, and I liked talking to him. He was just confident in what he did; everything he did with confidence, like he just knew what he was doing. He's got a great perspective.

***What wide receiver in the NFL do you enjoy watching the most?*** Definitely Tyreek Hill. I love watching him; he's a great player. I like the explosiveness that he brings.

***Do you feel like you have to fight the small-school label?*** I still have a big chip on my shoulder just because being from a small school, we still get beat. It wasn't like we were winning a lot. I think that was one of my biggest regrets at UMass. I couldn't get the team to come together and win, but I played harder in those big games. I love the feeling of playing in a big game.

***Why should an NFL team draft you?*** They're going to get a kid that comes every day and is going to work as hard as he can. He's not going to look back. I might make a couple mistakes, but the next day, I will come back and work 10 times harder.

PHOTO BY AP PHOTO/MICHAEL DWYER

PHOTO BY JAY BIGGERSTAFF-USA TODAY SPORTS

who locates the ball very well and appears to adjust quickly to the football in the air. He has excellent instincts as a runner after the catch and despite his lack of size, he is difficult to tackle on the run because of the extra gear he possesses. That speed at the Senior Bowl was no surprise, but he also showed an impressive physique for his frame.

**WEAKNESSES:** He is not a strong blocker and even though the effort is there, his lack of size will hurt him in that regard. Inability to fight for contested catches, and he has struggled against longer corners. Despite his crafty moves and change-of-direction ability, he doesn't yet have a variety of routes at his disposal. Doesn't break many tackles and if defenders get into his body, he might struggle to beat a physical cornerback. Does have some special teams experience, but he is not an accomplished kick returner.

**Grade: 7.1**

## 14. MECOLE HARDMAN, Georgia*

5-10, 183 40 time: 4.32 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** An electric kick returner who ended up declaring for the draft after being the team's second-leading receiver, with 34 catches for 532 yards and seven touchdowns. He really developed into a receiving threat as a sophomore and despite being on an offense full of playmakers, he was able to carve out an important slot role for himself. Hardman finished as an SEC all-conference selection in 2018 and was one of the most feared return men in college football with his game-changing speed. A natural athlete, NFL teams have inquired about possibly moving him to cornerback at the next level.

**STRENGTHS:** Hardman eats up chunks of yardage like a hungry hippo. He has rare timed speed and is a dangerous kick returner because of his tremendous vision, along with superb acceleration. He should develop into a true four-down player immediately with his ability on special teams and the kind of threat he can be on end arounds/jet sweeps. He has excellent body control and is a hands catcher who attacks the ball at the catch point. His stock is at its zenith with his 40 time.

**WEAKNESSES:** While he possesses a lot of versatility, he still is far from a finished product at wide receiver and does not offer a variety of routes at this point. A lot of his plays were manufactured, and he'll need to show that his lapses in concentration at times during his career are out of his system. His lack of bulk and less than ideal size lead to poor results in the running game as a blocker.

**Grade: 7.1**

## 15. ANTOINE WESLEY, Texas Tech*

6-4, 200 40 time: 4.58 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Wesley is a playmaker who burst onto the scene in 2018, finishing the regular season with the second-most receiving yards in the nation (1,410), while averaging 16.0 yards on 88 catches, nine of which went for touchdowns. It was a highlight-reel type of year for Wesley, who made a handful of acrobatic catches, one-handed grabs and jump-ball snags.

Although some NFL teams are sure to be leery of the one-year wonder, his versatility to play inside, outside and near the line of scrimmage bodes well for his draft stock.

**STRENGTHS:** He possesses great body control to go along with tremendous length. Wesley also flashes plus acceleration and is dangerous after the catch, with the ability to make defenders miss in the open field. His movement skills are rare for his size and the ball-skills he is capable of are stupendous. He has excellent concentration and outstanding length to give him a truly elite catching radius with how well he can adjust. He has a real knack for tracking the ball, converting the impossible catch and making plays happen.

**WEAKNESSES:** He doesn't consistently gain separation from defenders, but makes up for it with his size, something that he might not get by with against NFL cornerbacks. Wesley is not a nuanced route runner yet and is still scratching the surface of what he can do in that area. He doesn't have a proven track record with just one season of production to evaluate and he had occasional drop issues.

**Grade: 6.9**

## 16. GARY JENNINGS, West Virginia

6-1, 213 40 time: 4.58 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Jennings is a quick-release deep threat who made life possible for David Sills V and his 50-50 balls, as Jennings took the top off the defense for the Mountaineers. The sleek receiver is capable of changing gears, stopping, starting and running away from corners. He was Big 12 all-conference during his final season, a year in which he turned into one of the more consistent receivers for Will Grier.

There is a lot to like about Jennings' games, especially with the way he's able to explode out of his stance and get into his route and how he was able to finish as a senior with eight touchdowns.

**STRENGTHS:** Separates with plus acceleration and does a nice job of using his hands to shed contact from potential jams. Has experience playing different receiver positions and has played a variety of roles on offense. He gets vertical after cuts very well and understands where he needs to put a corner in order to set them up for a move.

**WEAKNESSES:** He doesn't have a ton of moves after the catch and won't make many defenders miss. His ball skills are still a work in progress at times; he appears to struggle to adjust his depth because he's not a hands catcher. His field awareness is not a strength, as he can lose the marker at times and doesn't exactly toe the sideline. He isn't a strong blocker despite having the size to make a difference.

**Grade: 6.8**

## 17. TERRY McLAURIN, Ohio State

6-1, 205 40 time: 4.49 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Coached by former NFL wideout Brian Hartline at Ohio State in 2018, McLaurin is a pro-ready receiver that brings added value as a special teams gunner. He should hit the ground running at the next level because he is a highly coachable player.

Former Buckeyes head coach Urban Meyer has stated that McLaurin is one of the hardest working players he has ever been around. A two-time team captain, he was named offensive player of the game against Penn State despite not making a single catch, largely because of his fearless blocking. The Indianapolis native had a tremendous week of practices at the Senior Bowl and may have played his way into the top 100 overall picks.

**STRENGTHS:** A thick-built receiver with excellent power and outstanding blocking ability, capable of decleating defensive backs with his devastating hits. He is a strong runner after the catch and has tackle-breaking skills. Possesses legitimate timed speed, strong hands and has played more than 40 games for the Buckeyes. He understands how to find the weak spots in the op-

posing secondary and does a great job of getting open on broken plays.

**WEAKNESSES:** He was overshadowed at Ohio State because of a crowded supporting cast and being asked to do the dirty work. Only adequate height. While he has quality ball skills, he didn't catch everything thrown his way. He can run through tackles, but he is not overly creative after the catch despite having top-notch speed. Doesn't win a lot of jump balls and needs to improve his ability to high-point contested passes.

**Grade: 6.7**

### 18. EMANUEL HALL, Missouri

6-2, 195 40 time: 4.61 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The Tennessee native was a state champion athlete in track during high school, leaping 6-8 in the high jump. He also won two AAU Junior Olympic track gold medals in 2011. Overall, his length, quickness, athleticism and experience make him a solid mid-round draft selection. He is a future starter in the league because of his physical traits and deep-threat ability, but he could turn into a star-level player if he can avoid the injuries that have caused him to miss time during his career.

**STRENGTHS:** A big, strong kid that can run for days. He is a rare athlete at his size with a track background and he should test out exceedingly well at the Combine if he's healthy enough. Possesses a lot of suddenness and quick feet for a big man, which allows him to get right up on top of a corner in his stem. He is fast at stacking up defensive backs because of his route running.

**WEAKNESSES:** Has struggled with drops in the past and can tend to be a body catcher. He has endured a variety of nagging injuries (shoulder and groin) and has never played a full season in college, leaving one to question his ability to make it 16 games in the pros. He needs to make sharper cuts and get on top of his feet during his routes.

**Grade: 6.6**

### 19. DAVID SILLS V, West Virginia

6-3, 210 40 time: 4.64 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Famously offered a scholarship at age 13 by Lane Kiffin, Sills matured from a highly touted quarterback recruit into one of the most dominant receivers in college football. Mountaineers head coach Dana Holgorsen converted Sills into a receiver and turned him into a big-time red-zone threat; no FBS player had more receiving touchdowns the last two seasons than Sills (33).

Sills was a clear favorite target of Will Grier during his WVU career and profiles as a very effective perimeter receiver with his ability to beat cornerbacks in contested catch situations.

**STRENGTHS:** He is possibly the best jump-ball receiver in this class with his ability to contort his body, adjust to the football and make plays in mid-air that other wideouts don't have a chance to make. He has plus ball-skills, a long frame and tremendous balance for a guy his size. He is excellent at locating the football on over-the-shoulder throws and could make a living on the outside catching jump balls.

**WEAKNESSES:** Not a strong runner after the catch and has just a little wiggle. His ability to separate at the next level will be his biggest area of concern because he's not a fast starter out of his stance and doesn't have a third gear to run away from defenders. He was not impressive during practices at the Senior Bowl and looked slow through his routes.

**Grade: 6.5**

PHOTO BY THOMAS B. SHEA-USA TODAY SPORTS

### 20. DARIUS SLAYTON, Auburn*

6-2, 190 40 time: 4.57 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Slayton has a lanky frame with long arms and terrific top-end speed. He made his presence known as a sophomore with a 22.2 yards-per-catch average. The Georgia native had a knack for getting open deep and had instant chemistry with quarterback Jarrett Stidham. He has the athleticism needed to be a starter, but he's still refining his craft as a route runner and will need time before he develops into a regular contributor.

**STRENGTHS:** Consistent at locating passes and attacking the ball. A strong runner after the catch, with the balance and body control to run right through contact. His acceleration allows him to stop, start and leave cornerbacks behind. He is not a knock-'em down blocker in the run game, but he does a good job of absorbing contact on blocks and steering defenders. Has worked to be more than a deep threat and that showed up in his 2018 footage with more intermediate routes in his work.

**WEAKNESSES:** Doesn't do a great job of high-pointing passes and although he fights on contested throws, he loses his fair share of his opportunities. Comes from an offense that didn't ask him to run a lot of complex routes, so what he's been taught will be limited. He struggled with injuries early in his career and only has a small sample size of work in college. He has inconsistencies adjusting to the ball and can struggle with concentration lapses at times.

**Grade: 6.0**

### 21. MILES BOYKIN, Notre Dame*

6-4, 228 40 time: 4.61 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Idolizes Calvin Johnson and chose No. 81 because of that. Boykin didn't do much until his 2017 season in a bowl game against LSU when he caught a one-handed pass and galloped for 55 yards to score the winning touchdown. He led the Irish in receiving in 2018 and declared for the draft with one year of eligibility remaining.

Boykin is a big-bodied receiver with rare size and strength. In fact, he can easily be mistaken for a tight end at nearly 230 pounds. He uses his wide frame and prototype length to win 50-50 situations and box defenders out like a small forward.

**STRENGTHS:** He is a rare leaper with a near 40-inch vertical jump and at his height; presents a mismatch to any defense. Highly skilled at back-shoulder passes, jump balls and contested catches due to his length, but his hands are extremely strong. Fights defensive backs for the football and is gifted at adjusting off-target footballs. A true perimeter player that can make plays up and down the sidelines and is a very effective stalk blocker with his bulky frame.

**WEAKNESSES:** Not a speed receiver and understandably so, but how fast his starts are and how sudden he is will be huge question marks. He is not running a full tree of pass patterns at this point and rounds off a lot of his routes. He will need to refine his footwork to consistently get open at the next level. Limited after the catch as a runner with few moves in the open field.

**Grade: 6.0**

### 22. HUNTER RENFROW, Clemson

5-10, 175 40 time: 4.62 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Although Renfrow isn't special athletically in any trait — he is your quintessential try-hard wideout — the fact of the matter is he keeps answering the bell every time it's rung. He is already a timeless legend at Clemson, going from walk-on recruit to famously catching the game-winning touchdown against Alabama in the 2017 championship game as a sophomore and becoming a reliable go-to slot option for Deshaun Watson, Kelly Bryant and Trevor Lawrence.

**STRENGTHS:** He was an option quarterback in high school and as a result, he is a natural ball-handler and pass-catcher with exceptional ball skills. He understands how defenses work. On plays that happen out of structure, he does a great job of moving back to the passer to bail his quarterback out. Surprisingly effective in contested catch situations despite his size and he has enough wiggle to get open on short to intermediate passes.

**WEAKNESSES:** Upon first glance at Senior Bowl weigh-ins, you might have mistaken him for an uber driver. His lack of top-end speed is noticeable. He finds ways to get open only because of his craftiness and savvy, but how he is able to separate at the next level is a legitimate concern. He brings special teams experience, but he is not a difference-maker as a return man and he can only play slot, so his versatility is limited.

**Grade: 5.8**

### 23. ANTHONY JOHNSON, Buffalo

6-2, 211 40 time: 4.55 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Johnson transferred to Buffalo from Iowa Western Community College by way of Butler Community College, so there's no questioning how bad this guy wants to play in the league. He possesses serious NFL bloodlines, including cousins Jadeveon Clowney and Johnathan Joseph. Johnson was a go-to option in both of his seasons at Buffalo with two 1,000-yard campaigns and 25 total touchdowns during his Bulls career.

**STRENGTHS:** A smooth deep threat who has a knack for getting on top of a cornerback, finding their weakness and making catches around them. He has mastered the over-the-shoulder catch and making plays

on back-shoulder throws because of how quickly he locates the pass and adjusts to the football. He has plus ball skills with strong hands and he's super reliable in 50-50 ball scenarios and contested catch situations. High effort as a blocker and understands how to angle his man away from the play.

**WEAKNESSES:** Consistently finds ways to get open and makes plays on contested passes, but he doesn't have second-level explosion and appears to be a mono-speed type of athlete that lacks the extra gear needed to run away from people. He doesn't have any elaborate routes at his disposal and his ability to put moves on a defender after the catch is debatable. He doesn't have great lateral quickness and appears to be a maxed-out type of athlete at this point.

**Grade: 5.7**

### 24. JAKOBI MEYERS, NC State*

6-2, 196 40 time: 4.56 6th Round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A former quarterback recruit, Meyers transitioned into one of the more dependable receivers on the team by the end of his career. The early graduate underclassman is a smart savvy route runner, as he understands how to break down defenses and diagnose the weakness in the coverages he sees. Meyers appears as if he's been playing receiver his whole life with his exceptional ball skills, uncanny ability to get open and excellent open-field moves.

**STRENGTHS:** His football IQ and knowledge of breaking down defenses from his quarterback days is evident in his route running. He excels on broken plays and communicating with the passer, but he's also an effective runner after the catch with a smooth running style. Appears to move effortlessly and his ball skills are stellar, as he looks to have put in a ton of work in that area. He was one of the standouts at the wide receiver position during practices at the Senior Bowl.

**WEAKNESSES:** He's more quick than fast and lacks pop off the line of scrimmage when he gets out of his stance. He isn't going to string moves together, but he has some wiggle to him. He isn't going to strike anybody down in the running game and he tends to let blocks into his body. Has a knee surgery in his history and his limited exposure to the position could cause a slow start at the next level.

**Grade: 5.6**

### 25. TYRE BRADY, Marshall

6-2, 206 40 time: 4.58 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Began his collegiate career at Miami but transferred after two seasons. Was quickly one of the best players on Marshall's roster and led the team in receptions and receiving his first season with the Herd. Brady is a long X receiver who can win consistently on the outside because of his length, awareness and reliable hands. He was voted a team captain and is well respected in the locker room.

**STRENGTHS:** He does an excellent job manipulating a corner's movements and forcing them into mistakes by tricking them with false steps. Has ideal length and playing speed, but his best asset is savvy and route running. Routinely makes contested catches and gives his quarterback a big target when plays break down out of structure. He is shifty in and out of his breaks; just finds ways to get open and create space.

**WEAKNESSES:** Not a strong runner after the catch despite his physicality and size. He also struggles to maintain his blocks with somewhat underwhelming effort in the running game. Was suspended for three games at Miami in 2015, and NFL teams will look into exactly what went on at Coral Gables. There's a little rigidness in his movements and while he has reliable hands, he can let some passes into his body at times.

**Grade: 5.6**

## 3 TO WATCH

### SLEEPER

**Andy Isabella, UMass**
A blazing speedster, Isabella possesses a track background that enables his next-level speed. Also runs solid routes and has dependable hands.

### COULD DISAPPOINT

**D.K. Metcalf, Mississippi**
Despite being medically cleared by doctors, a scary neck injury suffered last season and limited experience (21 games played) has to give teams pause.

### SMALL SCHOOL STUD

**Alex Wesley, Northern Colorado**
An exciting playmaker who has demonstrated the ability to run a full route tree; averaged 20 yards per catch this past season.

### 26. TERRY GODWIN, Georgia

5-11, 174 40 time: 4.49 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** His speed is electrifying, as Godwin plays at a faster clip than other receivers. He was definitely running at a faster pace than everyone else on the field during the East-West Shrine Game practices. The kid made arguably the play of the week with his one-handed catch during practice and clearly made some money at the event. Godwin can play inside or outside and brings special teams experience as a return man. He was drafted in the 33rd round by the Atlanta Braves in 2015; Godwin is a gifted all-around athlete with natural hand-eye coordination.

**STRENGTHS:** He is a twitched-up slot type who has the speed and change-of-direction ability that is ideal for today's game. Works his way open with subtle spacing, alternating speeds and crafty route running. He has plus ball skills because of his knack for tracking the football and adjusts his hand placement so well. He caught, ran and threw for a touchdown during his career at Georgia.

**WEAKNESSES:** He has a slight build and small frame, leaving some concern as to how much of a pounding he can absorb at the next level. He is a willing blocker but nothing more than a get-in-the-way type of option. His ability to defeat a larger corner that presses him is open to debate as well.

**Grade: 5.5**

### 27. ALEX WESLEY, Northern Colorado

5-11, 184 40 time: 4.52 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** An Alvin Harper type of receiver who constantly seems to find himself running behind defenders for the wide-open touchdown. Wesley earned team captain honors this past season and all 32 teams have made the journey out to Northern Colorado to get an up-close look-see at the speed burner who has received advice from former UNC wideout Vincent Jackson during the draft process. His performance at the Senior Bowl only helped to boost his draft stock.

**STRENGTHS:** A long strider with the acceleration to leave defenders in his dust. His speed and hands are obvious positives; a three-time NCAA 400-meter champion in track, he averaged nearly 20 yards per catch during his senior campaign. Wesley executes a nice out-route.

**WEAKNESSES:** Will need to develop his route running at the next level to show that he has more than one string to his bow. Has struggled with hamstring issues in the past, which probably contributed to his lean muscle frame and track background. Small-school level of competition will be a factor.

**Grade: 5.3**

### 28. PRESTON WILLIAMS, Colorado State*

6-4, 210 40 time: 4.50 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A transfer from Tennessee, Williams played two seasons in Knoxville, catching just 16 passes for 247 receiving yards and two touchdowns. He exploded onto the NFL radar during his one year at CSU, producing one of the greatest seasons in school history. He totaled 96 receptions for 1,345 receiving yards and 14 touchdowns this season. NFL teams must weigh the risk/reward of selecting such a highly talented player with a checkered background.

**STRENGTHS:** A lengthy, fast wideout who can pick up chunks of yardage after the catch in a heartbeat, he can be a tough runner to bring down in the open field and possesses great agility. Demonstrates tremendous balance and ability to track the ball over his shoulder. Extremely athletic and plays with high energy.

**WEAKNESSES:** His Volunteer career got off to a shaky start with a torn ACL suffered entering his freshman season. He would also serve a suspension for an offseason misdemeanor assault charge. In 2017, Williams sat out the season due to NCAA transfer rules. Tends to struggle against physical, man coverage. His route running could use more polish.

**Grade: 5.2**

## WORTH WATCHING

**Tyler Johnson, Oklahoma State (6-0, 193)**
Ability to win one-on-one matchups and renewed dedication to the weight room make him one to watch.

**Tony Pollard, Memphis (5-11, 208)**
Effective pass-catcher, nice change of direction and can get around the edge; reminds some of Ty Montgomery.

**Penny Hart, Georgia State (5-8, 180)**
Helped himself at Senior Bowl, as he was too fast, too twitchy to handle.

**KeeSean Johnson, Fresno State (6-1, 199)**
Possesses tremendous ball skills, excellent ball range and is an advanced route runner who can create separation.

**Damarkus Lodge, Mississippi (6-1, 204)**
Underrated speed; sharp route-runner with the ability to stretch the field; very willing blocker.

**Johnnie Dixon, Ohio State (5-11, 198)**
Team captain; certified deep threat who compares favorably to T.Y. Hilton, but he has dealt with injury woes.

*For further analysis of the 2019 wide receivers, visit www.nfldraftscout.com.*

# Tight Ends

T.J. HOCKENSON

PHOTO BY KEITH GILLETT/ICON SPORTSWIRE (ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA AP IMAGES)

**OVERVIEW** We saw an influx of young tight ends enter the league two years ago with three first-round selections in the 2017 NFL Draft, the most since 2002.

That total dipped back down to one in 2018, as Hayden Hurst (Ravens) was the lone tight end taken in the first round a year ago. This year's class boasts a talented, deep group from which about a half dozen players could be selected in the first two days.

Iowa produced a pair of early-entrant prospects in T.J Hockenson and Noah Fant, who could possibly be the first two tight ends off the board. While a bit undersized, Irv Smith Jr. of Alabama looks to follow in his father's footsteps as a quality NFL tight end.

The depth of the class is further evident in later rounds. It could produce Day 3 picks who are capable of starting at the next level, including Drew Sample of Washington, Isaac Nauta of Georgia and Foster Moreau of LSU, among others.

The wild card of the bunch is West Virginia's Trevon Wesco, who presents a rare combination of size and athleticism, which can add an element of creativity to an offensive scheme.

Fourteen tight ends have been selected in the past two NFL drafts, and that number likely will be slightly exceeded in 2019.

**2019 CLASS GRADE**
**A**

*Denotes underclassman

### 1. T.J. HOCKENSON, Iowa*

6-4, 250 40 time: 4.77 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A first down waiting to happen, you might as well call him, "Mr. Automatic." Hockenson plays beyond the whistle. He could be an all-pro fullback; the fact that he possesses the size to play tight end and can be a receiving threat as well makes him a blue-chip prospect at his position.

After an outstanding season, in which he accumulated 760 receiving yards on 49 receptions and six touchdowns, Hockenson was awarded with the 2018 John Mackey Award as the top tight end in the nation. He also took home the Ozzie Newsome Award and first-team All-America honors. It won't be surprising to see Hockenson in the first round, as he impresses as a seam threat, security blanket and soul-crushing blocker.

**STRENGTHS:** The way he is able to be used is an offensive coordinators dream. He can play in-line; he can play outside, H-back, fullback, and he is a mismatch for linebackers or safeties. He's a banger; big-time blocks and train-wreck collisions coming at you. An exceptional blocker who does a nice job of seeking out his targets in the second level and holding his blocks on the seal. He puts emphasis on making sure he gets proper positioning, and he takes pride in it.

Possesses great size, above average athleticism and certified toughness. He averaged nearly 15 yards per catch for his career. Mentored by Iowa offensive coordinator Brian Ferentz, who coached Rob Gronkowski and Aaron Hernandez during his time in New England.

**WEAKNESSES:** He can be a bit wild out in the open field and will get a bit reckless, forgetting technique. His route running could stand to use some sharpening; he tends to get sloppy feet on occasion and will round off his cuts. Overall, this is a pretty clean player. If you want to criticize his speed you can, as he doesn't run as fast as some of the other pass-catching tight end prospects. Has just 23 games played for his career, which makes him one of the least experienced players in this year's class.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Zach Ertz, Philadelphia Eagles — The complete package, Hockenson can do it all and could very well join Ertz one day soon as one of the premier tight ends in the league.

**Grade: 8.2**

## FLASHBACK

**It takes at least three years to determine the success or failure of draft picks**

*Here's a snapshot of recent hits and misses*

**Diamond in the Rough**

**George Kittle, 49ers (Fifth round, 2017)**
The fifth-round pick has already exceeded expectations, setting an NFL single-season tight end record with 1,377 receiving yards on 88 catches this past season.

**Swing and Miss**

**Maxx Williams, Ravens (Second round, 2015)**
After being selected as the first tight end off the board, Williams has totaled just 63 receptions for 497 yards and three touchdowns in four injury-riddled seasons.

**Breakout Player**

**Evan Engram, Giants (First Round, 2017)**
Many felt Engram was poised for a breakout year in 2018 but nagging injuries dampened expectations; look for him to rebound with a big year in 2019.

### 2. IRV SMITH JR., Alabama*

6-3, 241 40 time: 4.66 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Smith was one of the breakout performers of the 2018 college football season, as he exploded onto the NFL radar with 710 receiving yards and seven touchdowns (a school record), while averaging 16.1 yards per catch. He brings NFL pedigree with him, as the son of former New Orleans Saints first-round pick Irv Smith Sr., but teams will have to weigh whether his junior campaign was a fluke.

The athletic traits certainly appear to be there, so as long as his size doesn't hinder him at the next level, Smith has the makings of being an ample weapon.

**STRENGTHS:** Blessed with an exceptional blend of speed, balance and crisp route running. He can work the middle of the field and also be a deep threat, possessing the ability to outrun linebackers and safeties. Shows a dependable set of hands and yards after-the-catch ability. Displayed his body control and soft hands in the national title game, hauling in four passes for 43 yards and making some stellar blocks at the second level.

A tremendous off-the-ball blocker, he made some big strides playing with his hand in the dirt this past season and made sure to really get after it. Demonstrates good hand usage, a strong jab punch and the power to drive defenders. He pays attention to small details such as technique and carrying out his fakes.

**WEAKNESSES:** Doesn't have top-notch height, and shorter arms limits his ability to play above the rim, which makes his vertical game a bit limited. He can do a better job of getting off the jam at the line of scrimmage. Does well lined up at H-back but seemed a bit out of place when utilized in the backfield as a fullback. Will have to battle the "one-year wonder" label, as he busted out from nowhere in a very big way.

**Grade: 7.9**

## PROTOTYPE

**✔ Release**

**Kaden Smith, Stanford**
Demonstrates a quick get-off and the know-how to beat the jam at the line of scrimmage, which allows him to find open spots in the defense.

**✔ Route Running**

**Irv Smith Jr., Alabama**
A well-rounded tight end, his best attribute is his crisp route-running, which allows him to create separation and make plays while lining up at multiple positions.

**✔ Hands**

**Caleb Wilson, UCLA**
No one saw more targets or had more receptions at his position than Wilson, who led the FBS with 60 grabs for 965 yards and four touchdowns, while flashing great hands.

**✔ After the Catch**

**Noah Fant, Iowa**
If Fant is going to factor in at the next level as a receiving threat, it will be due to his speed and athleticism; a natural athlete who can outrun many linebackers and safeties.

**✔ Blocking**

**Foster Moreau, LSU**
The gritty Moreau is a tough, hard-nosed throwback who prides himself on blocking, but he has also dazzled with his occasional catch ability.

**✔ Intangibles**

**T.J. Hockenson, Iowa**
There are few weaknesses in his overall game; Hockenson declared for the draft after his redshirt sophomore season and for good reason; it wouldn't be surprising to see him develop into one of the upper-echelon tight ends in a few years.

### 3. NOAH FANT, Iowa*

6-4, 241 40 time: 4.78 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A rare athlete at his position, the Hawkeyes' athletic, pass-catching tight end decided to sit out his bowl game with an eye toward the draft. Some NFL teams may have "buyer beware" due to his poor blocking, but his offensive prowess and measureables are through the roof. His size and tantalizing athleticism, along with his 40-inch vertical, will have NFL talent evaluators salivating.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses short-area quickness and ability to separate, which makes it naturally easy for him to get open. Iowa capitalized on using an up-tempo offense this season when they saw a mismatch in his favor, lining him up in the slot, outside and at H-back. He often ignited the Hawkeyes offense with a momentum-changing catch and scored 18 touchdowns over the past two seasons. Averaged 13.9 yards per catch for his career. Has a great vertical game and timing to compete with jump-ball passes. Does a nice job of using his big frame to box out defenders and give him leverage to make the catch.

**WEAKNESSES:** One big negative is that he continued to be benched for long periods of time due to his subpar run blocking, but it's not for lack of trying. His blocking is better than most, but there is room for improvement in his technique driving opponents, extending his arms and staying on his assignment longer. Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz holds his tight ends to high standards.

Needs to do a better job of looking up and scanning the field after he catches the ball; he left some extra yardage on the field due to his lack of awareness. His route running needs refinement, and he has been getting by on pure agility and quickness. Can be a bit late off the snap of the ball at times; sometimes it is by design, other times he is late to the spot on his blocking assignment. Will occasionally drop an easy pass.

**Grade: 7.8**

### 4. KADEN SMITH, Stanford*

6-4, 252 40 time: 4.83 2nd-3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A well-rounded tight end who is a stout blocker and can serve as a security blanket underneath with his ability to go over the middle. He credits Dalton Schultz and Zach Ertz (both Stanford alumni) for improving his run blocking. The Cardinal boast a long lineage of producing NFL tight ends, which makes organizations feel just a little bit more comfortable about making the selection. Smith possesses starter traits.

**STRENGTHS:** He takes off quick from the line of scrimmage and seems to have a knack for finding the open seam in the defense. Demonstrates tremendous focus and concentration catching balls in traffic. He shows great arm extension and stretch to go up top for passes. A solid in-line blocker who is aggressive with his hands but can also be a weapon out in space. Has the ability to gain additional yards after contact.

**WEAKNESSES:** He could stand to improve his footwork and route running. Can tend to get a bit too stiff and stood upright when blocking at times; needs to work on his knee bend and getting lower. Will overpursue his blocking angles at times. Not much athleticism or yards after-the-catch capability — he pretty much dives or falls down on a lot of his catches. You would like to see more production in the red zone, as he had just two touchdown catches this past season. Has dropped the occasional easy pass.

**Grade: 7.7**

### 5. CALEB WILSON, UCLA*

6-4, 235 40 time: 4.64 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Possesses strong bloodlines, as his father, Chris Wilson was a 12th-round draft pick for the Chicago Bears and currently serves as defensive line coach for the Philadelphia Eagles. A former high school quarterback, Caleb started his college career at Old Dominion as a tight end, and he then tried to walk on at USC as a quarterback when his dad was a coach there. He would finally land at UCLA and switch back to tight end.

Wilson seemed to hit his stride last season, registering career highs across the board with 60 receptions, 965 receiving yards and four touchdowns. It was the type of year that warranted bypassing his senior season and entering the draft.

**STRENGTHS:** Has proven to play way too fast and athletically for linebackers to cover and is a threat on offense to stretch the field. His long, slender frame makes it difficult for safeties to guard, creating mismatch opportunities all over the field. Tracks the ball like a receiver and shows the ability to pick up yards after the catch; 42 of his 60 receptions (70 percent) went for a first down. Still relatively new to the position, he came into his own as a junior and really started to learn the finer nuances of how to beat coverages. A humble player "who gets it," according to his coaches.

**WEAKNESSES:** Would like to see him be more prepared prior to the snap. At times, he'll be standing with hands on knees waiting for the ball to be hiked; that certainly won't fly at the next level. Lazy habits create lazy tendencies, which could be why he has had lapses holding onto the football. He had broken bones in his foot as a sophomore, which, ironically, was the same injury that his father endured late in his career at Oklahoma.

**Grade: 7.3**

### 6. JOSH OLIVER, San Jose State

6-5, 250 40 time: 4.84 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Mr. Wonderful steps off the bus looking like Paul Orndorff with his body-beautiful frame; ideal physique with all the tools to be a serviceable tight end at the next level. Albeit a bit raw, Oliver is going to need some coaching up and development. He appears

PHOTO BY JESSE JOHNSON-USA TODAY SPORTS

to have good strength but just needs to learn how to use it more effectively. Oliver projects as a factor in the passing game at the next level.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses great size and a well-built frame, to go along with "A-plus" athleticism. In addition to tight end, he can be used as an H-back to stay in and block or be utilized as a pull blocker in the run game. Demonstrates dependable hands and the ability to make contested catches. He has also lined up as a slot receiver on occasion. He finished the season as the most targeted (99) tight end in the country, hauling in 56 receptions for 709 yards, with nearly half of his yardage coming after the catch.

**WEAKNESSES:** Footwork will need refinement, especially in pass blocking, where he tends to cross his feet, when he should be kick-sliding to stay in front of the defender. Can tend to whiff entirely on blocks; doesn't seek out his blocking assignment, rather he lets the defender come to him. Still a raw player overall, especially in the blocking department, which makes him a bit of a developmental project.

**Grade: 7.0**

### 7. DREW SAMPLE, Washington

6-4, 251 40 time: 4.86 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** He amassed 30 career starts, despite sharing duties with Will Dissly (Seahawks) for most of his career, as the Huskies have implemented various tight-end formations on offense. In fact, Sample possesses a catch/block skill-set that compares very favorably to Dissly, who was a fourth-round pick in the 2018 NFL Draft. After a prodigious performance at the Senior Bowl, his stock might be even be higher.

**STRENGTHS:** An exceptional blocker and above-average pass-catcher, Sample is a noted hard worker and mature player (he was married this past summer). He takes excellent blocking angles when seeking out targets in the second level. Adapts well to poorly thrown balls, adequate bend, excellent length and has deceptive athleticism. He can serve as a safety net for quarterbacks, especially on check downs and make the most with the ball in his hands after the catch. He was also a basketball standout in high school.

**WEAKNESSES:** While athleticism is more than what you would anticipate, he is limited somewhat in terms of bend/flexibility and his speed isn't great. Has just one full season of starting experience on his resume, but he did manage to play in 31 games for his career. Not a huge playmaker in the passing attack but won't hurt you either; he averaged just 10.6 yards per catch for his career, one of the lower marks among this year's tight end crop.

**Grade: 7.0**

### 8. ALIZE MACK, Notre Dame*

6-4, 247 40 time: 4.73 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** One of the more volatile prospects in this year's draft class, Mack was suspended for the bowl game in the 2017 season due to an internal manner. He missed the entire previous season after failing to qualify academically. He originally accepted his Senior Bowl invite, but school requirements prevented him from attending. He played at powerhouse Bishop Gorman High School in Las Vegas, where he won three state championships. However, the hype outweighed his production during his time in South Bend. Has the potential to be a special player if the light bulb ever turns on.

**STRENGTHS:** Blessed with prototypical size, plus tremendous athleticism and ball skills. Has good burst off the line of scrimmage when he breaks into his route; if you don't jam him, chances are he can hurt your defense down the middle of the field. He has demonstrated the uncanny ability to hold onto the football, even when he gets his bell rung.

**WEAKNESSES:** Has been in trouble off the field due to immaturity. Was forced to sit out his sophomore season due to academic issues. On the field, he can be a lazy route runner. Too often, he relies upon his athleticism to get by. He goes down easily upon contact and should be a better blocker than what he laid down on film playing at Notre Dame. Is he dedicated?

**Grade: 6.8**

### 9. ISAAC NAUTA, Georgia*

6-4, 240 40 time: 4.74 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Arrived in Georgia as a heralded five-star recruit and while he didn't quite live up to expectations, Nauta finished his career strong and appears ready for the next level as an early entry. He finished his career with 42 games played, including 27 starts, registering 68 catches for 905 receiving yards and eight touchdowns. Possesses the size, frame and maturity that should make for a rather seamless transition to the NFL.

**STRENGTHS:** A highly competitive and physical player. Also a big-play threat who is difficult to tackle in the open field. Has been used out of the slot and is not afraid to go over the middle. Shows sound blocking technique and great strength. Does a nice job of riding out his blocks and staying on his man through the whistle. A vocal leader who holds teammates accountable and isn't afraid to speak up, according to Georgia head coach Kirby Smart.

**WEAKNESSES:** Was a streaky performer during his Bulldogs career, with 29 catches as a freshman, then just nine as a sophomore, before bouncing back with 30 receptions as a junior. The Georgia offense did not make great use of the tight end in its passing game. Will get caught turning and running before he actually catches the ball, leading to an occasional drop. Would like to see him be a bit more aware of the first-down marker; he often cuts off his route prior to the marker.

**Grade: 6.7**

### 10. DAX RAYMOND, Utah State*

6-4, 250 40 time: 4.89 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** An under-the-radar prospect when he initially declared, Raymond caught the attention of NFL scouts at the Senior Bowl, as he was allowed to participate since he had earned his college degree. He served a two-year LDS church mission in Russia and redshirted in 2016 due to a back injury, so he is a bit of an older prospect (graduated high school in 2013 — played quarterback). A fast-riser leading up to the draft; don't be surprised to see Raymond selected higher than projected.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses great size and tremendous athleticism; in addition to being an outstanding blocker, he's also an offensive threat. He presents a tall, wide target, especially in the red zone — the Aggies tried to utilize him in space and even lined him up outside on occasion. Playing in a spread Air Raid system, he proved too athletic for linebackers and presented a tough task for opposing safeties due to his size. Has a dependable set of hands and did a nice job improvising to help out his quarterback when needed. Has been praised by coaches for his hard-working mentality and high football IQ.

## SPOTLIGHT

### Trevon Wesco, West Virginia

***You came from Lakawanna (as a transfer); what's in the water down there?*** West Virginia has a strong connection to that school. Yeah they do. Coming out of high school they sent me to Lakawanna; we've had a lot of previous guys that went to Lakawanna too so, yeah, it is a strong, strong program, probably one of the best that's on the East Coast for sure.

***What expectations did you have entering 2018 and what type of work did you put into it?*** I put in a lot of hard work in the spring and in the summer. I had a good spring. I thought it was going to be a good season for me. I just wanted to come in to help my team in any way that I could because I know we were supposed to have a good team. We had a pretty good team this year and I'm just glad that I could contribute.

***How has the NFL Draft process treated you thus far?*** I plan to train for about eight weeks. It's a long process but at the end of the day, it's all worth it, so you might as well give it your all. I'm a versatile player, I can do it all; that's what they want me to come in and do.

***How much pride do you keep in your blocking game?*** I take a lot of pride in it because not everybody wants to block; that's not the main thing, everybody wants to catch touchdowns. Blocking, I take a lot of pride in it and I try to do the best I can. I would like to give credit to my position coach Dan Gerber; he honed me a lot along the way, taught me to play the game of football the right way — as aggressive and physical as I can.

***Who's the toughest opponent you have faced?*** I don't know, there's a lot of good competition in the Big 12, a lot of defensive ends who are really good players. I had to go up against a couple good ones, Ben Banogu and L.J. Collier from TCU, they're pretty good players, but the Big 12 has some good defensive ends, good linebackers, so it's hard to say just one or two people are good. They're all good.

PHOTO BY KEN INNESS/ZUMA WIRE (CAL SPORT MEDIA VIA AP IMAGES)

**WEAKNESSES:** He missed three weeks due to a hand injury in 2018. He has also dealt with back issues, which can be worrisome. His blocking is OK, but there's certainly room for improvement; he can refine his hand placement and learn how to square up better to make better use of his leg drive. When evaluating him, you must also factor in that he is several years older than the competition he is playing against. The offensive scheme wasn't designed to feature the tight end in the passing game, so he didn't exactly stuff the stat sheet.

**Grade: 6.3**

### 11. JACE STERNBERGER, Texas A&M*

6-4, 250 40 time: 4.83 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The transfer exploded onto the NFL radar this season with 48 receptions, 832 receiving yards and 10 touchdowns, after registering just one reception during two seasons in Kansas. He also played one season at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M (21-336-6) in between. A three-sport athlete in high school, Sternberger competed in basketball, football and track. He was a 5-foot-9 high school quarterback until a shoulder injury robbed him of his arm strength and he enjoyed a six-inch growth spurt between his sophomore and junior years. Teams may be leery of the limited body of work, but the intangibles are enticing.

**STRENGTHS:** One of the more explosive tight end prospects in college football last year, Sternberger possesses a great mix of block, catch and run skills. He also carries strong bloodlines, as his mom, Jackie, was a Hall of Fame basketball player at Southeastern Oklahoma State and his dad, Jason, played football at Southeastern Oklahoma. Was named Offensive MVP and given the Strength and Conditioning Offensive Aggie Award. Plays with a bit of a chip on his shoulder.

**WEAKNESSES:** Limited production, and having just one season of full-time action under his belt usually tends to make for a tough transition to the next level. Seems to be a bit of a one-trick pony with his "all-go" seam route; would like to see him expand his route-running tree. Some additional bulk will certainly help him for the next level, and he needs to develop better blocking awareness. Some time in the film room learning opponent's tendencies would probably be beneficial for him.

**Grade: 6.2**

### 12. FOSTER MOREAU, LSU

6-4, 250 40 time: 4.87 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Issued the coveted No. 18 jersey, which is awarded to the player who epitomizes an LSU football player on and off the field. He owns plenty of experience with 49 games played, including 32 starts. A superior blocker, surprisingly it was his pass-catching prowess on display at the Senior Bowl which caught the attention of NFL scouts, as he made several grabs over the middle. While he doesn't do any one thing spectacular, Moreau is sound in all facets of the game.

**STRENGTHS:** Known for his blocking ability, as he's considered to be among the best in this year's draft class. However, you shouldn't underestimate his pass-catching abilities. He is more than capable in the receiving game and shows excellent balance, along with the ability to adjust his body mid-air to badly thrown balls. Nice bend and flexibility for his frame and extremely versatile, having lined up at H-back and fullback. His work ethic and football intelligence are the cream of the crop, plus toughness and grit, which is as good as it gets.

**WEAKNESSES:** Played in an offense that doesn't utilize its tight end heavily, so doesn't own gaudy stats. Will tend to use his chest to bring the ball in; needs to do a better job of bringing the ball in with his hands because that can be the difference between a pick-six and a completion at the next level. Limited speed and athleticism. Runs a bit upright with the ball in his hands.

**Grade: 5.9**

## 3 TO WATCH

### SLEEPER

**Drew Sample, Washington**
An impressive combination of blocking and pass-catching should make him a TE1 at the next level; he presents a great blend of size, athleticism and toughness.

### COULD DISAPPOINT

**Noah Fant, Iowa**
There's no doubting what an exceptional athlete Fant is, but there are questions about how his attributes will translate to the next level.

### SMALL SCHOOL STUD

**Donald Parham, Stetson**
A mismatch at 6-7, Parham racked up 85 catches for 1,319 yards and 13 touchdowns as a senior — impressive numbers, but he may be left without a true position at the next level.

### 13. THOMAS SWEENEY, Boston College

6-5, 253 40 time: 4.86 6th-7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** An Anthony Fasano-type of player who is a better pass-catcher than given credit for. Boston College was the only major football program to offer him a scholarship coming out of high school. His physical limitations could hinder his draft stock somewhat, but Sweeney is an old-school player who has proven to get the job done.

**STRENGTHS:** A big, wide-bodied, stocky tight end with athleticism, Sweeney possesses dependable hands and is a solid route runner. A lethal weapon on the play-action; he shows a natural knack to find the open seams in the defense and barrels over defenders in the open field. Also able to make contested grabs in traffic. He rarely ever came out of games for Boston College and provided a physical presence along the offensive line.

**WEAKNESSES:** He saw limited action early during his collegiate career due to his porous blocking skills but has made strides since. His blocking technique is not fundamentally sound, but he is strong, aggressive and physical at the point of attack, so he can be coached up on technique. There are also serious athletic limitations here. He won't outrun anyone, but he will surely run over someone, Fred Flintstone style.

**Grade: 5.7**

### 14. TREVON WESCO, West Virginia

6-3, 274 40 time: 4.94 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A rare athletic specimen for a man of his size. While he lacks a true position, Wesco is a rare triple threat who can block, catch and run. Opposing defenders are definitely hoping that the "Wesco Wagon" doesn't roll through their neighborhood because he is a load to bring down. He has gained about 50 pounds of muscle over the last few years, making him part offensive lineman, part tight end, while lining up at fullback, H-back, out wide or in the slot. His athleticism and physicality, to go along with his blocking and soft hands, should make it easy for an NFL team to find ways to use him.

**STRENGTHS:** A pulverizing blocker, Wesco doubles as a grave digger, leaving defenders dead in his tracks. The Mountaineers finally figured out a way to best utilize his skill-set, as he caught 24 of 26 pass targets as a senior, for 366 yards and one touchdown; he had just two catches his previous two seasons combined in Morgantown (transfer from Lackawanna Junior College). A tough, physical and borderline violent runner with the ball in his hand, his all-state high school basketball background shows up in his athleticism. He can box out a defender using his great size when making the catch and is very tough to bring down in the open field.

**WEAKNESSES:** What is he at the next level and how many reps a game can he receive? While his massive size may not be in a fit for some offenses around the league, he is too talented not to find a role. With that being said, a contending team that can afford to use a luxury pick on an accessory-type player would probably be the category that Wesco falls into.

**Grade: 5.5**

### 15. CJ CONRAD, Kentucky

6-4, 252 40 time: 4.82 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A four-year starter, Conrad was a streaky player for the Wildcats. When he was on and effectively being used in the offense, Conrad served as a lightning rod, able to bust through offenses for big plays; he had six career touchdowns that have gone for 20 yards or more. At other times, it seems his name should very well be on the back of a milk carton. He has struggled with drops, but his versatility is paramount.

**STRENGTHS:** Big, wide-bodied target for his quarterback. While he lacks speed, his route running is sound and he is one of the better blockers in this year's draft. He shows the ability to pass protect or single block extremely well and shows fundamentally sound technique. He has been used in-line and at fullback, similar to that of Rhett Ellison for the Giants.

**WEAKNESSES:** He needs to prove that he can be a more dependable pass-catcher. Conrad received some tough love from head coach Mark Stoops, who criticized him in the past for his drops but has also praised his toughness. He would go several games in which he failed to register a catch. Has endured some horrid quarterback play throughout his career, which hindered his offensive production.

**Grade: 5.2**

## WORTH WATCHING

**Kahale Warring, San Diego State (6-5, 250)**
A former walk-on who didn't begin playing football until senior year of high school; raw but talented.

**Zach Gentry, Michigan (6-7, 262)***
Huge catch radius for his quarterback; enough athleticism to line up in the slot; decent blocker.

**Kendall Blanton, Missouri (6-5, 265)**
Tall, wide target with a knack for finding the open seam, along with nice concentration and balance.

**Dawson Knox, Mississippi (6-4, 257)***
Great size, athleticism and hands, while his blocking remains a work in progress.

**Donald Parham, Stetson (6-7, 242)**
A lengthy pass-catcher with good running ability but too tall to get low enough to be an effective blocker.

*For further analysis of the 2019 tight ends, visit www.nfldraftscout.com.*

# Offensive Tackles

**OVERVIEW** It has become increasingly hard to identify offensive tackles, where athleticism and agility are required. Big men who can move typically don't grow on trees. Factor in the influence of RPOs and a growing increase of Air Raid influence across the nation, and linemen just aren't being taught the fundamentals necessary at the collegiate level.

Just two offensive tackles were chosen in the 2018 first round, and an encore performance could be on tap come April.

Alabama stalwart Jonah Williams should be the first offensive lineman to hear his name called in Nashville, although there were some early whispers that some NFL teams might prefer him to kick inside.

Another player expected to go early is Ole Miss tackle Greg Little, who has dominated at every level of his career and has no plans of stopping now. In addition, players such as Jawaan Taylor of Florida and Kaleb McGary of Washington, are part of a big wave of tackles who could all be off the board within the top 50.

While the quality of offensive line play has been diminished in recent years, we could see additional tackles pushed up the board due to a dire need around the league.

**2019 CLASS GRADE**
**C-**

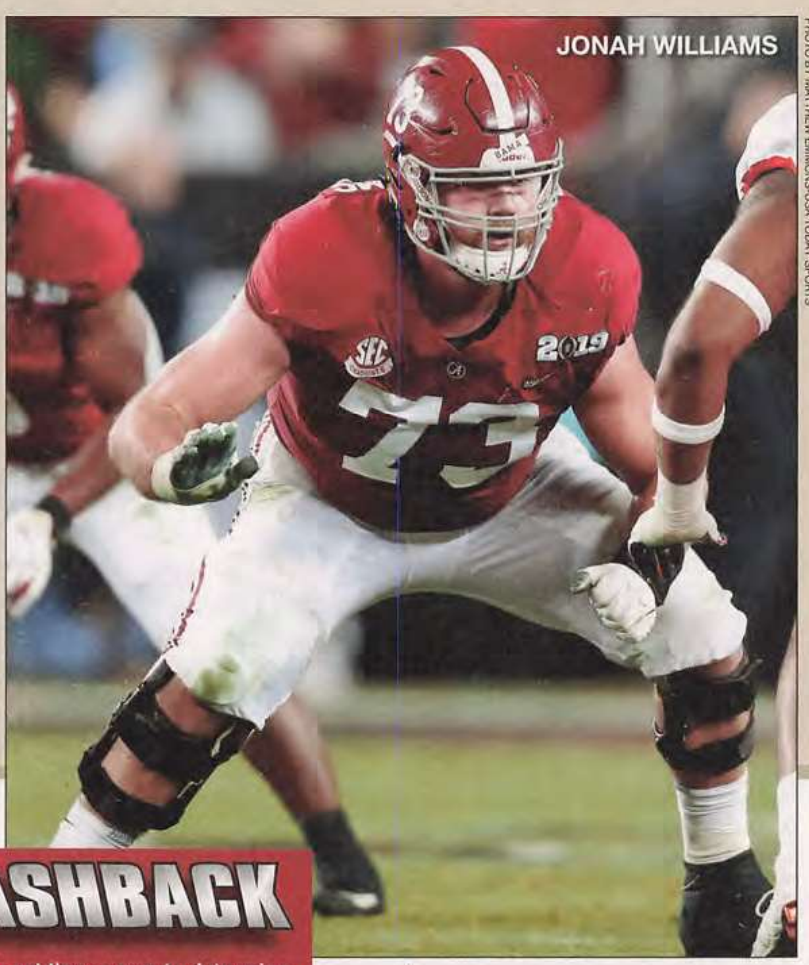


PHOTO BY MATTHEW EMMONS-USA TODAY SPORTS

*Denotes underclassman

### 1. JONAH WILLIAMS, Alabama*

6-5, 301 40 time: 5.02 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Williams is a self-motivated student of the game who possesses a great blend of length and strength, along with light feet, all of which projects to him being a top blind-side protector in the NFL.

Known to be a self-proclaimed "Film Junkie," former Alabama offensive line coach Mario Cristobal described Williams to be a "football addict." We saw glimpses as a true freshman, as he started every game at right tackle while illustrating a full understanding of coordinator Lane Kiffin's offense.

Williams would eventually move to left tackle as a sophomore, serving as a key cog on the Crimson Tide national championship team. His body of work is as impressive and consistent as any offensive line prospect in the 2019 draft class, and he comes complete with a great set-up in pass protection.

Williams might not possess elite length and agility, but he's savvy, tough ... and he was as proven as it gets at the collegiate level.

**STRENGTHS:** Extremely quick off the snap, he demonstrates terrific timing and anticipation. A knee-bender who understands angles and leverage. Shows terrific athleticism getting to the second level in the run game. Does an excellent job of keeping his feet pounding through contact and sustaining his leg drive, as well as maintaining balance on countermoves and collisions. Demonstrates a nice low stance, solid footwork and sound technique.

His kick-step technique allows him to handle the outside edge rusher. His ability to recover and regain balance even when he does get beat is part of what makes him so unique. Takes good angles in the second level. Sound mechanics, as upper body and lower body are constantly working in sync.

He notably got bulldozed on a play by Clemson star defensive end Clelin Ferrell in the national title game, but Williams had his share of one-on-one wins, controlling the edge rush with excellent placement and timing of his hands. Williams' leadership characteristics, demeanor in the trenches and overall skill-set will make coaches extremely excited.

**WEAKNESSES:** He can actually work up too much steam working in the open field and will miss his second-level blocks. His aggressiveness can lead to borderline wild and sloppy mechanics on occasion. He can sometimes get off his blocks too early at times.

He'll go for the double down and try to combo block, when he should really just ride out his initial assigned blocking assignment. Could probably benefit from bulking up about 10-15 pounds. There have been whispers about Williams being dubbed "soft" within the scouting community leading up to the draft.

## FLASHBACK

**It takes at least three years to determine the success or failure of draft picks**

*Here's a snapshot of recent hits and misses*

### Diamond in the Rough

**Julien Davenport, Texans (Fourth Round, 2017)**
Viewed as a developmental player coming out of Bucknell, Davenport progressed faster than expected and started 15 games last season at left tackle, protecting Deshaun Watson's blindside.

### Swing and Miss

**Ereck Flowers, Giants/Jaguars (First Round, 2015)**
The Giants made Flowers the ninth overall pick of the 2015 draft coming out of Miami but cut him after three subpar seasons; he has since latched on with the Jaguars but remains a liability.

### Breakout Player

**Braden Smith, Colts (Second Round, 2018)**
Promoted to starter halfway through the season, Smith provided a huge boost to the Colts offensive line and is in line to play a huge role for the team moving forward.

## PROTOTYPE

### ✔ Run Blocking

**Kaleb McGary, Washington**
A pure mauler, McGary possesses brute strength, to go along with massive hands and prototypical size; the Huskies averaged 176 rushing yards per game in 2018.

### ✔ Pass Blocking

**Greg Little, Mississippi**
Forced into action early in his career due to an injury to Laremy Tunsil, he has gone toe-to-toe with a plethora of pass-rushers who have since gone on to the next level.

### ✔ Initial Quickness

**Yodny Cajuste, West Virginia**
Blessed with a great combination of size and athleticism, Cajuste is the most explosive tackle prospect off the ball, getting out of his stance swiftly and gaining leverage at the point of attack.

### ✔ Pulling/Trapping

**Mitch Hyatt, Clemson**
The savvy Hyatt brings a wealth of experience, playing more snaps than any other Clemson player in school history, including a bevy of inside run techniques that allow him create running lanes.

### ✔ Downfield

**David Edwards, Wisconsin**
Arguably the Badgers best offensive line prospect, Edwards plays with a seek-and-destroy mentality that allows him to get into the second level quickly and cleanly.

### Intangibles

**Jonah Williams, Alabama**
The feisty Alabama tackle has received his fair share of criticism but when you talk about consistency, smarts, technique and overall understanding of how to play the game, he rises above all.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Jake Matthews, Atlanta Falcons — A solid starter at the next level, capable of stepping in on Day 1 and anchoring an offensive line for the next decade.

**Grade: 8.4**

### 2. GREG LITTLE, Mississippi*

6-5, 325 40 time: 5.23 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Little played in all 36 games during his three seasons at Ole Miss, including 29 starts at left tackle. He made five starts as a true freshman, holding his own against the likes of Myles Garrett (Browns) and filling in for future first-round pick Laremy Tunsil (Dolphins). He was an All-SEC selection this past season, after earning second-team honors as a sophomore.

A former five-star recruit, Little won back-to-back state championships in high school, protecting the blind side for a quarterback named Kyler Murray. In college, it was easy to see why he was so highly regarded as a recruit — a natural left tackle with athletic movement.

Some patience might be required, but his skill-set should enable him to compete for a starting job immediately at the next level. A first-round pick will be well worth the investment.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses prototypical size and strength, along with a nice wide stance and solid footwork. A physical player who demonstrates a strong hand punch and covers a lot of ground with his kick-slide. His aggressiveness and balance are two of his greatest strengths. Shows the ability to handle counter moves in pass protection and is able to handle one-on-one on the edge with just about anyone. Can also generate a strong push in the run game.

He dropped 20 pounds after his freshman year, which helped improved his quickness, flexibility and endurance, while maintaining his strength. He owns good bloodlines, as his father, Derrick Little, played linebacker at South Carolina and was drafted in the sixth round by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1989.

**WEAKNESSES:** He'll need to work on improving his hand placement, as well as his line of sight against moving targets when making the transition to the next level. Poor hand placement means he can get too far outside of pads, which allows defenders to easily discard of him. Shows limited bend and flexibility; occasionally will get stood upright.

While he has made strides in the footwork department, there is still room for improvement. When he makes a big mistake, it may linger on the next few plays. He is built a little high cut, but he is well proportioned with very long arms and a naturally big frame to match his long limbs. His weight may need to be monitored, as he has fluctuated from anywhere between 320 and 340 pounds.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Duane Brown, Seattle Seahawks — With similar frames, both possess quick feet, while Little flashes the same traits that has made Brown a high-level NFL starter for the past decade.

**Grade: 8.3**

### 3. JAWAAN TAYLOR, Florida*

6-5, 328 40 time: 5.46 1st-2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Some teams may prefer him to play guard at the next level, but he'll likely get an opportunity to start off on the outside, given the lack of depth at the offensive tackle position coming out of college in recent years.

An immediate impact player as a true freshman, Taylor was a three-year starter for the Gators at both left and right tackle before deciding to enter the draft early. The Florida native is expected to hear his name called by early Day 2 but he could possibly slide into the back end of Round 1. His ability to stick and move at his size will have offensive-line needy teams salivating.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses excellent size and above-average bend; not an athlete by any means but able to side-step and cover his assigned space laterally due to sound technique. Demonstrates nice mirror skills in pass protection and shows the ability to be a road-grader in the run game with his devastating blocks. Plays with infectious energy that teammates thrive off of and spends a lot of time in the film room, according to his coaches.

**WEAKNESSES:** Can take his foot off the gas pedal at times and needs to consistently stay on his assignment through the whistle. Can struggle with faster, quicker pass-rushers on the edge. Has weighed as much as 385 pounds and had to drop 50 pounds to earn his scholarship to Gainesville, so making sure he keeps his weight in check will be part of the deal. Owns somewhat sluggish feet, but he compensates with sound technique, especially in pass blocking. Has room for improvement with his hand usage.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Joe Barksdale, Arizona Cardinals — A big-bodied tackle who relies on strength and savvy, showing natural instincts, along with the ability to stymie pass-rushers one-on-one.

**Grade: 8.0**

### 4. KALEB McGARY, Washington

6-7, 321 40 time: 5.27 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Originally a defensive lineman, McGary made the switch to offense upon the arrival of head coach Chris Petersen at Washington. He has dealt

PHOTO BY P PHOTO/ROGELIO V. SOLIS

with plenty of adversity, including three procedures to help stabilize his heart arrhythmia, a house fire that destroyed his family's farm and his dad being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

He ended his career on a high note, as the winner of the 2018 Morris Trophy, awarded to the top offensive lineman (as voted by opposing defensive linemen) in the Pac-12.

While almost all his college experience was at right tackle — other than some short-yardage plays — he was so impressive at the Senior Bowl that he was moved to the left side for some snaps so teams could get a glimpse of the possibilities there. He earned rave reviews all week. McGary, who has personality plus and would be a fan favorite, has a style of play and the kind of strength that will have NFL teams discussing him early in the draft.

**STRENGTHS:** At 6-7, he's a mammoth, imposing presence who uses his brute strength to overpower opponents, which allows him to excel in run blocking, which is the part of the game he likes the best. He also boasts tremendous agility and has a 35-inch vertical jump. His weight is distributed so well over his frame that he looks like a tight end.

He started at right tackle the past four seasons, with 53 games played (47 starts) and demonstrates the necessary athleticism to be an upper-echelon starting right tackle at the next level.

**WEAKNESSES:** He has some work to do in terms of hand placement. His feet are somewhat slow and he's a bit stiff in the hips. He could do a better job with his pad level. McGary suffers from AFIB (irregular heartbeat), while he has been medically cleared to play football, it's still a situation that bears monitoring.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Andrew Whitworth, St. Louis Rams — A long, strong power blocker who shows excellent athleticism for his size and has even further room to grow into his frame.

**Grade: 7.9**

### 5. BOBBY EVANS, Oklahoma*

6-4, 301 40 time: 5.04 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A consistent performer, Evans manned the left tackle position on an offensive line that featured a collection of NFL talent, and he started all 40 games over the past three seasons. The son of former Oklahoma basketball player Bobby Joe Evans, and brother of former Oklahoma linebacker Tay Evans. His proven resume and strong bloodlines make him a candidate to hear his name called early on Day 2.

**STRENGTHS:** The long-armed, agile blocker possesses big paws and utilizes his arm jabs effectively to knock opponents off-balance. Does a nice job of handling combo blocks and is able to get into the second level swiftly. One of his best traits is that he's constantly looking to hit someone. Known for his hard working mentality, he dissects the pre-snap coverage well. His versatility is another bonus, as he has experience playing both tackle positions.

**WEAKNESSES:** Can play a bit too upright at times. Needs to get his hands into position faster and be ready to engage. Footwork and speed are just average. Suffered a torn ACL during his senior season of high school but has remained relatively healthy during his time in Norman. He wears big, bulky knee braces on both legs, which seem to somewhat limit his mobility.

**Grade: 7.7**

### 6. DAVID EDWARDS, Wisconsin*

6-6, 315 40 time: 5.17 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** After he received a very favorable grade from the NFL Draft Advisory Board following his sophomore campaign, Edwards decided to return for one more season in hopes of polishing up his overall game. A high school quarterback, Edwards came to Madison as a tight end before making the switch to right tackle, where he started for the past three seasons, protecting the blindside for his starting quarterback Alex Hornibrook, who is left-handed.

Edwards owns the hard-nosed, gritty Wisconsin pedigree that usually translates well to the NFL. He played through injury during his final season, which obviously hindered him, but his strong film from a healthy sophomore campaign probably solidifies him as a top 50 overall selection.

**STRENGTHS:** An excellent blend of size, length, power and agility. Exceptional run blocker, showing great strength and the ability to hold his blocks. Has top-tier athleticism for a player at his position.

Has filled out his frame nicely, bulking up 75 pounds, while maintaining his athleticism and demonstrating sound technique, along with an aggressive style of play, despite having never played offensive line prior to arriving to Madison. However, he received plenty of reps over the past three seasons, starting 31 of 37 games played.

**WEAKNESSES:** Suffered a left shoulder/arm injury during fall camp that he played through during his final season at Wisconsin. He sat out the final three games of the season to rest the shoulder and allow himself to regain strength in his arm. Does a nice job getting into the second level but will fail to deliver an impact hit on the defender once he arrives to his spot.

Can play too tall at times and needs to continue to hone his skills versus pass-rush moves. Needs to fill out his frame. Has only played the position a few years in college. It doesn't appear that he practices his chop-block technique much.

**Grade: 7.6**

### 7. ANDRE DILLARD, Washington State

6-5, 310 40 time: 5.23 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Finished his career starting all 39 games played since the beginning of his sophomore year, which was an impressive feat, considering he didn't begin playing football until the eighth grade. Cougars coach Mike Leach praised Dillard for being one of the hardest workers and most studious players on the team.

He has work to do on his run-block fundamentals but his experience, wide frame and athleticism will be highly appealing to NFL teams. There's a chance Dillard could ascend higher on draft boards by the time late April rolls around, especially given that he was among the top tackles at the Senior Bowl.

**STRENGTHS:** An outstanding blocker in pass protection due to his great mirror technique, a powerful jab punch, which keeps defenders at bay, in addition to his exceptional footwork and great strength. A knee bender who demonstrates well proportioned weight distribution when changing directions and getting into position.

**WEAKNESSES:** A bit still in the hips, he is not fluid getting to the second level. Needs to work on being more consistent with his hand placement. Can be semi-robotic in pass pro in a sense where opponents might be able to pick up tendencies. Arrived at Washington

## SPOTLIGHT

## Kaleb McGary, Washington

***Was there anyone at the Senior Bowl who lined up opposite of you that stood out?*** That's hard to answer because there's a lot of good defensive linemen. Greg Gaines my teammate from Washington, Jalen Jelks from Oregon, just a bunch of really good players, it's hard to pick just one.

***Since you mentioned your teammate Greg Gaines, what makes him such a special player?*** He's smart, he's quick and he's strong. And him not being super tall, it kind of helps him out because as a nose guard/defensive tackle you want to take on double teams, which makes guys like me, the taller ones, more physical because he doesn't have to bend. He already has good pad level. He's a real pain in the butt and that's why he's here right now because he's good and he does have all the tools.

***Can you give us a self-scouting report about yourself?*** Pocket aggressive, I like to do it up. I don't like doing anything fancy or tricky. Forward and backwards is the only mode I prefer to go. If I have to do something different for a particular play, I will, but I like straight ahead, that's the way I roll. ... Run blocking is my favorite.

***How cool was winning the Morris Trophy (as Pac-12's top offensive lineman)?*** It's awesome. I didn't expect it. Truth be told, I wasn't even really thinking about it. I had forgotten about the award completely. It's an incredible honor. I feel very proud and very grateful and honored. It's awesome. Awesome.

***You were convinced (out of high school) you were a defensive lineman?*** Oh, yeah, I didn't want to play O-line. Offense sucks. Defense is fun.

***What made you switch?*** I saw the light. It's like Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker. I started out as Darth Vader and now I'm Luke Skywalker. I just felt kind of out of place on defense. It was fun and all that, but I just kind of felt out of place. So when Coach (Chris) Petersen approached me about switching over ... I decided, "What the heck, What are they going to do, send me back over to defense?"

PHOTO BY JOHN CORDES/ICON SPORTSWIRE/ ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA AP IMAGES

State weighing 240 pounds and will need to continue to bulk up as he transitions to the next level.

**Grade: 7.5**

### 8. YODNY CAJUSTE, West Virginia

6-5, 321 40 time: 5.20 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** An intriguing blend of athleticism and strength, Cajuste continues to develop his overall game, as he has progressed each season as a four-year starter at West Virginia after playing just one year of high school football. One of the most athletic lineman in this year's draft, the Miami native was a basketball standout growing up and it shows by the way he tests.

Opponents are in for a long day when they are matched up against Cajuste. His upside may be the most appealing aspect of his talent. It wouldn't be surprising to see him outperform some of the players chosen ahead of him at his position in the long run.

**STRENGTHS:** He possesses elite pass-blocking characteristics (just ask former West Virginia quarterback Will Grier), does a nice job of recognizing blitzes and is flagged for very few penalties. Flashes top-notch mirror technique and owns an immense wingspan. Has a good understanding of leverage and angles; also does a nice job of distributing his weight when shifting directions.

Holds his ground well against pass rushers, able to get defenders pushed in the right direction on run plays and overall is a high-effort player. He can bench press 495 pounds, dead lift 735 pounds and owns one of the best 10-yard splits in the draft, which is a testament to his initial burst off the snap.

**WEAKNESSES:** Shows anxious feet in pass protection and does the pitty-patter; needs to refine his footwork. Would like to see him take longer strides, especially laterally on a more consistent basis. Can be a bit late getting out in front on screen passes, which results in missed blocks.

He suffered through foot and knee injuries as a freshman, then endured a season-ending ACL injury during the first game of his 2016 campaign. While he has been injury-free the past two seasons, his medical check in Indy could also influence his draft stock.

**Grade: 7.4**

### 9. MITCH HYATT, Clemson

6-5, 310 40 time: 5.08 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Hyatt could stand to add roughly 10 pounds to hold up against the bull rush, as he is more of a finesse blocker who out-positions his man, as opposed to driving him out of a play. But his experience and smarts allow him to compensate for lack of quickness and he should be able to hold the fort as an eventual starter.

He'll continue his family's legacy into the pros; his uncle Dan Benish played for the Tigers 1981 championship team. Mitch, who was a key part of the Tigers' 2018 championship team, owns a resume that suggests he can contribute immediately.

**STRENGTHS:** Highly athletic and excels in pass protection. Possesses a fundamentally sound kick-slide. Shows impressive speed for his size and is very efficient in space when seeking out secondary defenders. He also has great bend, which shows up on film when engaging pass rushers. Shows a keen understanding of his role and job assignments. Shouldn't be any surprises: The three-time first-team All-ACC selection played in more games and took more snaps than any player in Clemson history.

**WEAKNESSES:** He can get completely manhandled by bigger defenders. Can be a bit slow to the spot. Would like to see him do a better job of finishing and needs to learn how to throw an effective chop block. You can see on tape where he occasional lunges at a defender and whiffs entirely, which just makes you scratch your head.

**Grade: 7.1**

PHOTO BY MARK J. REBILAS-USA TODAY SPORTS

### 10. TYTUS HOWARD, Alabama State

6-5, 322 40 time: 5.14 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A high school quarterback who began his college career as a 225-pound walk-on tight end, Howard was talked into practicing with the offensive line on his first day of practice. Nearly 100 pounds and a four-inch growth spurt later, he is now one of the top offensive tackle prospects for the draft, oozing what many scouts see as untapped potential. He has nice size and strength, although he has some areas to clean up, such as footwork.

Ironically, he was nicknamed "Weenie" growing up, but he doesn't hear that any more because the buzz he created during the Senior Bowl was deafening. Don't be surprised to hear Howard's name called during the first two days.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses a thick upper and lower body, which makes for a solid anchor; he doesn't give up much ground. A strong kick slide and ability to fit quickly help his ability to mirror. Also very athletic and does an adequate job getting into the second level. Physicality and toughness were on full display during the Senior Bowl — the step up in competition was clearly not a problem. A local product, he was very involved in the community.

**WEAKNESSES:** A bit raw, will need to polish his technique. Would like to see him utilize strength more, he left some possible pancake blocks on the table while playing right tackle for Alabama State. Tends to struggle with snap count as he will sometimes jump offsides, while at other times he seems late to react. Requires a strict eating habit in order to maintain weight.

**Grade: 7.0**

### 11. MAX SCHARPING, Northern Illinois

6-5, 320 40 time: 5.29 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The balanced attack of the Northern Illinois offense reflects in Scharping's all-around game. The Green Bay native started the past four seasons, primarily at right and left tackle. His speed seemed a bit questionable during the week of Senior Bowl practices, which could hinder his draft grade somewhat. Overall, Scharping has his limitations but could be a potential starter in the right scheme and, at least, a valuable swing lineman who step in and play up and down the line.

**STRENGTHS:** The All-MAC standout demonstrates fundamentally sound technique and solid footwork. He makes excellent use of his hands and takes nice angles when seeking out defenders in the second level. In addition, he possesses great arm length and an extremely strong jab, which comes courtesy of his offseason boxing regime. He has played both tackle positions, in addition to guard, so versatility is another bonus.

**WEAKNESSES:** Can do a better job of staying low in his stance and needs to improve his footwork, especially his kick slide. He was often late off the snap when he stepped up against a higher level of competition at the Senior Bowl.

**Grade: 6.9**

### 12. MARTEZ IVEY, Florida

6-5, 310 40 time: 5.04 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** An experience offensive lineman with 49 games played, including a combined 44 starts at guard and tackle, Ivey is battled-tested playing in the SEC. He has shown his toughness playing through multiple injuries during his career, including knee, shoulder and ankle ailments at different points in time.

His extremely long arms may provide him with an opportunity to play tackle but his stout build also makes for an ideal power guard in a run-orientated offense at the next level. He has the strength and aggression needed for playing in close quarters in the interior. One thing is for certain, Ivey can provide an immediate boost for any team looking to bolster their front line.

**STRENGTHS:** A massive frame and great reach make it extremely difficult to get around him. He possesses a quick first step, makes great use of his hands and demonstrates powerful jabs, which can uncork defenders. Known for his tremendous work ethic, he's usually the last one to leave the building and is a lead-by-example type of presence in the locker room. A true mauler in the run game. Looked good at the East-West Shrine Game and put a good performance on tape during the season against Georgia.

**WEAKNESSES:** Nagging injuries seem to be a reoccurrence. He was slowed by a knee injury during his freshman season but still went on to start the final eight games. He also underwent offseason shoulder

surgery, missing the spring of his sophomore season, as well as being slowed by an ankle injury in 2016. His aggressiveness can get him caught out of position at times and scouts will want to see him do a better job getting a body on defenders in the second level. A lack of consistency prevented him from truly putting it all together in college.

**Grade: 6.7**

### 13. ISAIAH PRINCE, Ohio State

6-5, 310 40 time: 5.16 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Highly recruited out of high school, Prince chose Ohio State over Alabama and his hometown Maryland, so the talent was always there, it just took some time for the light bulb to turn on. A three-year starter at right tackle, he will probably remain in that position when he transitions to the NFL. He'll likely need to fill out his frame more before he's ready to compete for a starting job, but his fluid footwork and athleticism could find him extra favor among teams that utilize more of a moving pocket.

**STRENGTHS:** A well-respected team leader who takes pride in his toughness. Lunch-bucket player who brings high energy and athleticism. Captain of the offensive line; one of the most improved players he has ever coached at Ohio State, according to Urban Meyer. Adjusted well to a more RPO-based offense after early season struggles as a senior, in addition to making tremendous strides in the footwork department.

**WEAKNESSES:** Endured a few tough games such as the one against Minnesota in 2018 when he was flagged for three penalties and allowed three sacks, plus a nightmarish performance versus Penn State in 2016, in which the Buckeyes allowed 11 sacks for loss and six sacks that day. One has to wonder if the accumulation of errors takes a mental toll; he's a self-proclaimed sore loser and plays with a "pissed off" mentality.

**Grade: 6.1**

### 14. WILLIAM SWEET, North Carolina*

6-7, 300 40 time: 5.10 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Began last season starting at right tackle before switching over to left tackle and emerging as one of the most improved players in the nation. A hot recruit out of high school with offers from just about every school imaginable, Sweet offers a body-beautiful frame, to go along with the perfect blend of finesse and power. A team willing to invest a mid- to late-round pick on Sweet will reap the reward down the road, as he has all the intangibles to be a future starter.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses great size, a lean frame, outstanding arm reach and strong upper body. Was solid in pass protection, allowing just one sack in 398 pass-pro snaps in 2018, but was also an absolute stud as a run mauler. An extremely disciplined player, he was flagged for just one penalty all season. Demonstrates quick feet from his time as a high school tight end. Smart on and off the field, Sweet graduated with a bachelor's degree in communications and won the fourth annual Carolina Challenge Pitch Party, UNC's business venture competition for his cold compression sleeve concept.

**WEAKNESSES:** Underwent surgery on his torn ACL in fall of 2017. Can rely upon natural talent and raw strength a bit too much; will need to work on sharpening technique as he makes the transition to the next level. Will tend to anticipate contact in the second level rather than seek a body to hit. Will conserve his energy if he knows the run play isn't coming in his direction. Doesn't exactly gravitate toward the media cameras well.

**Grade: 6.0**

### 15. DENNIS DALEY, South Carolina

6-5, 324 40 time: 5.34 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A big-bodied mauler who can play inside or outside, Daley has plenty of experience playing tackle against supreme defensive line prospects in the SEC. However, his footwork and quickness will be tested as coaches will need to polish up his technique if he wants to man the edge in the pros. His body of work shows he's capable, but he must prove he can perform at a high level consistently.

Started his first two seasons at Georgia Military College before transferring to South Carolina, where he started his final two seasons. Daley needs some polish and figures to need a season or two of development.

**STRENGTHS:** Long frame, thick build and great strength enables him to hold a strong anchor against power rushers. In addition to his wide stance, he shows tremendous balance and is tough to move in the trenches. A consistent performer, scouts love his combination of size and athleticism. He demonstrates a natural feel for the game, while coaches have praised his leadership and work ethic.

**WEAKNESSES:** He can struggle against speed, as once his hips open up, he is easily beaten on the edge; he lacks the athleticism and footwork to recover. Needs to stay with his block through the whistle. Will allow defenders to get into his chest off the snap of the ball. Will endure an occasional mental lapse where he blows an assignment. Missed time due to ankle injury in 2018.

**Grade: 6.0**

### 16. PAUL ADAMS, Missouri

6-6, 312 40 time: 5.12 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A fiery player who finished his career with 38 consecutive starts. Adams has played in a fast-paced offense under former offensive coordinator Josh Heupel and a more traditional offensive scheme when Derek Dooley took over during his senior season. His intangibles such as leadership and endurance should allow the Nashville native to hear his name called from the podium in his hometown on Day 3.

**STRENGTHS:** In addition to his durability, he possesses great size and agility. Was a staple of consistency for the Tigers on the offensive line, proving to be stout at the point of attack against the run and excelling in pass protection. A well-respected presence in the locker room, Adams is a special leader who is known to connect with all teammates. A two-time team captain, head coach Barry Odom called him an extension of the coaching staff. Possesses a high school basketball background.

**WEAKNESSES:** He will tend to put his head down on occasion during pass protection and lose awareness of where his opponent is. Needs to do a better job of holding his blocks longer in the run game. Can make better use of his arms and hands, rather than trying to use his helmet as a sphere when blocking. Stiff hips make for somewhat limited flexibility.

**Grade: 5.9**

### 17. JACKSON BARTON, Utah

6-7, 303 40 time: 5.14 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Did an admirable job assuming the starting left tackle position from his former roommate Garrett Bolles (Broncos). While Barton is not as talented as Bolles, he certainly possesses the size and skill-set to play tackle at the next level.

His family bloodlines run deep at Utah as his father, uncle and brother have all starred at the school. Has a brother Cody who played on the team and is a linebacker prospect on the NFL radar. Diet includes 7,000 calories, according to his mom Mikki, who was an All-American basketball standout. The job of training for the next level begun a long time ago in the Barton household, and Jackson appears ready for prime time.

**STRENGTHS:** Long arms and huge wingspan allow him to keep pass-rushers at bay. Possesses a rare combination of size and strength. His high school basketball background shows up in his lean frame and athleticism. He's able to get into the second level with ease due to agility. Does an excellent job baiting defenders out of position and sealing off run lanes. Praised for his great leadership and football intellect. Also has experience playing special teams.

**WEAKNESSES:** Many scouts wanted to see some more nasty out of him. Needs to improve his foot speed and work on staying low out of his stance, which then gives him a steady frame due to his great length. Has just two seasons of starting experience under his belt, so technique and bend need some work.

**Grade: 5.7**

### 18. CHIDI OKEKE, Tennessee State*

6-6, 315 40 time: 5.32 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** After spending a couple of seasons at LSU, Okeke transferred to Tennessee State to seek more playing time. He earned All-Ohio Valley Conference honors this past season before announcing his intent to declare for the NFL Draft early. The Nigerian native never played football until after his arrival in the United States in 2013. Not ready to start right out of the gate, but he could be a late-round roll of the dice that comes up Yahtzee!

**STRENGTHS:** A raw talent with incredible length and athleticism, along with a seven-foot wingspan. His quickness off the snap of the ball and nimble feet are two of his greatest strengths. In addition, he is known to be an extremely hard-worker and a weight room warrior who can bench press over 500 pounds. Coaches have noted what a fast learner he is.

**WEAKNESSES:** The biggest knocks on Okeke have been his lack of aggressiveness and instincts. He showed remarkable improvement in those areas in 2018, but he is still a work in progress. He has been playing football for just five years, so he is literally still learning the game. Up until high school, he only played soccer and basketball.

**Grade: 5.6**

### 19. DERWIN GRAY, Maryland

6-5, 330 40 time: 5.25 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A true redemption story, Gray was a top high school recruit who ran into some academic issues, forcing him to spend the 2013 season at Fork Union Military Academy. He struggled early during his Terrapins career but managed to earn the starting left tackle job, finishing with 39 games played (25 career starts).

Gray has handled double duty both on the gridiron and as a father. He may now have to fit into a dual role in the NFL, as his size suggests he is built for tackle but his hand strength, quickness, power and grit may be better suited to play inside.

**STRENGTHS:** Wide-framed, run mauler who sticks with his blocks and takes good angles. Does a nice job driving his legs and sealing off run blocks to set a runner free. Maryland had a lot of big chunk plays running behind him off tackle. His ability to read stunts and stonewall blitzes are two strong suits. Shows strong ability to mirror and has lined up on either side of the ball. Capable enough out in space to get to second level; also able to pull down the line.

**WEAKNESSES:** Actually has very active hands but can improve his hand placement and become and even

more effective blocker. Can get caught out of position against speed rushers, lunging at them and overextending himself. Can be late to the spot getting into the second level. Has dealt with shoulder injuries in the past and had offseason surgery on his knee prior to his senior season. He also missed two games due to injury during his final year. Will need to clean up some of the penalties and lacks quick feet.

Grade: 5.4

### 20. ANDRE JAMES, UCLA*

6-5, 305 40 time: 5.04 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** He showed grit and guts this past season, playing just five days after his dad lost his battle with cancer. He finished his Bruins career making 32 consecutive starts. As a unit, the team averaged 40 more rushing yards per game than it did the previous year. He may lack the attack-dog mentality that you'd typically like to see from your offensive linemen, but he was a standout performer in the Pac-12 and owns the tools to work with in the NFL.

**STRENGTHS:** Holds his ground well and does a nice job picking up stunts. Has experience starting at both tackle positions, including 12 starts at left tackle in Chip Kelly's offense this past season and admittedly had to get in better shape because of it. According to his GPS used in practice, James would run anywhere between 4,000-5,000 yards per practice. Another requirement by Kelly is making sure that linemen learn all the positions.

**WEAKNESSES:** Would like to see him get lower in order to generate more power when run blocking. Looks to have average strength, as tape shows he can be pushed back by bigger, stronger linemen. Can do a better job of keeping his arms and hands inside. Doesn't always finish.

Grade: 5.3

### 21. TYREE ST. LOUIS, Miami

6-5, 323 40 time: 5.30 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Has plenty of experience, finishing his Hurricanes career with 34 consecutive starts and being named All-ACC honorable mention as a senior. St. Louis enjoyed a solid week at the East-West Shrine Game, where he showed off his versatility by lining up at four different positions. He started every game at left tackle last season, which exposed his inability to handle speed off the edge. He'll be much better suited for right tackle — where he has made 21 starts — or possibly even guard at the next level.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses excellent footwork, to go along with great length and agility. His speed, power and leg strength allow him to be a mauler in the run game. He has experience starting at right tackle and left tackle, in addition to playing special teams during his collegiate career. Team leader.

**WEAKNESSES:** Can get caught with his hands too far outside, which causes him to lose leverage. Has been exposed by speed due to stiff hips, and he will attempt to lunge at a defender once beaten. Needs to work a bit on his bend.

Grade: 5.3

### 22. TREY PIPKINS, Sioux Falls

6-6, 304 40 time: 5.24 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Blessed with prototypical size and athleticism, Pipkins dominated at the Division II level and was one of the standouts during the week of East-West Shrine Game practices. He oozes potential and his versatility to play multiple positions could allow him to be a valuable backup until he evolves into a full-time starter.

## 3 TO WATCH

### SLEEPER

**Andre Dillard, Washington State**
There were rumblings out of the Senior Bowl that Dillard could ascend into a top 50 selection and be a dark-horse candidate to crack the first round.

### COULD DISAPPOINT

**Jawaan Taylor, Florida**
An extremely talented player who dealt with weight fluctuation and mental lapses during his Gators career; teams must weigh the risks of selecting him with such a high selection.

### SMALL SCHOOL STUD

**Max Scharping, Northern Illinois**
The Green Bay native owns tons of experience, finishing his career by making 53 consecutive starts; he more than held his own against the top FBS competition at the Senior Bowl.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses excellent size and length, combined with tremendous athletic ability. Quick to beat his opponents to the spot; he says that ability, as well as his technique, was why he wasn't fazed during the step up in competition at the East-West Shrine Game. He began that week playing tackle, but was kicked inside to guard due to injuries. Credited with 146 career knockdowns, including 95 as a junior, according to the school's website. Also played basketball, in addition to track and field in high school.

**WEAKNESSES:** The level of competition is his biggest knock, playing at the D-II ranks. He'll need to bulk up and get stronger, there's plenty of room to fill out his frame, especially his upper body. Technique is still a bit raw and will need some coaching up.

Grade: 5.2

### 23. BRANDON KNIGHT, Indiana

6-5, 307 40 time 5.04 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A converted tight end — his one career catch went for a 22-yard touchdown as a freshman — Knight made the transition to full-time offensive tackle full during his sophomore season. Injuries have plagued an up-and-down career. His run-mauling prowess, along with his ability to hold up against foes who are bigger and stronger, could translate well to the NFL.

**STRENGTHS:** Really thrives at mirroring defenders in pass protection and fending off edge rushers with arm jabs and hand combat. Powerful punch and long arms allow him to knock defenders off balance. Excellent on pull and chip blocks; he can get down the line in a jiffy. Will never be one to back down from a challenge and is the first one to step up for his teammates.

**WEAKNESSES:** Seems to have a difficult time when blocking speed rushers and can get beat inside. His lack of quickness makes him late to the spot. He has struggled with injuries throughout his career, including a leg injury in 2016 that ended his season prematurely and he also missed spring ball in 2017. At the NFLPA Collegiate Bowl, he hobbled off with an apparent right knee injury.

Grade: 5.2

### 24. TYLER ROEMER, San Diego State*

6-7, 315 40 time: 5.15 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Redshirt sophomore declared for the draft early after starting at tackle the past two seasons. In fact, he had made 23 consecutive starts up until a 2018 suspension. While another season or two of development would have been beneficial for his transition to the next level, Roemer is viewed as a bit of a wild card with upside and might be worth a late-round flier.

**STRENGTHS:** A technician who is fundamentally sound, physical at the point of attack and shows phenomenal strength — he's considered a beast in the weight room. He's also athletic enough to get out front in space and seal off blocks in the second level. Was a 2017 Freshman All-American and SDSU's Offensive Lineman of the Year.

**WEAKNESSES:** Was suspended during the 2018 season due to violation of team rules and eventually removed from the team with two games remaining in the regular season. Teams will be sure to do their due diligence on the matter, which could ultimate dictate whether or not he's drafted.

Grade: 5.1

### 25. JUWANN BUSHELL-BEATTY, Michigan

6-6, 326 40 time: 5.33 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** He missed the regular season finale against Ohio State due to injury and decided to skip the Wolverines' bowl game in order to prepare for the draft. A confident young man who can be a valuable contributor in the pros if he stays on the straight and narrow.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses a big, wide body and is able to handle power rushers well. Quick feet and improved patience were key components to his success as a senior, as he showed great strides in his pass protection, in addition to being a stout run blocker. Has experience playing in a pro-style scheme, and he came a long way during the Michigan career, which shows his passion for the game.

**WEAKNESSES:** With just 19 career starts, he owns limited experience compared to some of the other players at his position. Will need to improve his hands, which can be over-aggressive at times and get misplaced. Has limited athleticism and average speed. Showed up to Ann Arbor immature and unpolished, while weighing as much as 350 pounds. Teams will need to make sure that he isn't a player who constantly needs to be under the microscope.

Grade: 5.1

## WORTH WATCHING

**Derrick Kelly II, Florida State (6-5, 324)**
Versatile lineman who can play guard or center; saw his draft stock drop due to injury.

**Ryan Pope, San Diego State (6-7, 315)**
A towering and tough, hard-nosed presence with great power and huge upside.

**Yosuah Nijman, Virginia Tech (6-6, 314)**
Combine invitee has experience at left and right tackle.

**Devon Johnson, Ferris State (6-7, 334)**
The D-III product is actually a skinny 334 pounds with plenty of room to bulk up.

**Ethan Greenidge, Villanova (6-5, 325)**
Big, thick body with sound footwork; his best football is ahead of him.

*For further analysis of the 2019 offensive tackles, visit www.nfldraftscout.com.*

# Guards

PHOTO BY KEVIN JAIRAJ-USA TODAY SPORTS

**OVERVIEW** Over the past two drafts just one first-round card has been turned into the podium with the word "guard" scribbled down. The Indianapolis Colts made Quenton Nelson the sixth overall pick in last year's draft, upgrading their offensive line in a big way.

However, this year's draft class may reflect the 2017 draft, when no guards were chosen in Round 1 but three were off the board by the end of the second round.

It wasn't an accident that Oklahoma won the Joe Moore Award, presented to the top offensive line in the nation. One of the main catalysts of the unit was junior Cody Ford, who played tackle in college but is best-suited for the interior at the next level.

The two interior players for the Sooners last season, Dru Samia and Ben Powers, are also expected to hear their name called early.

Just five guards were selected inside the top 100 during the 2018 draft, and this year's class seems to be right on par.

**2019 CLASS GRADE**
**C+**

*Denotes underclassman

### 1. CODY FORD, Oklahoma*

6-3, 338 40 time: 5.35 1st-2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Possesses an excellent combination of size, strength, agility and footwork. Was a big reason why the Sooners were winners of the Joe Moore Award, presented to the top offensive line unit in the nation.

He dropped about 10 to 15 pounds this past season, making the move to right tackle and playing primarily from a two-point stance. There's a possibility that he can play on the outside at the next level, which could catapult him higher in the draft if a pro team believes it can fix some inefficiencies at that position with his technique. Given some issues against speed rushers, though, he might be best suited to play inside — and right away — in the NFL.

Either way, expect to hear his name called no later than early on Day 2, with a chance to sneak into the late first round, which was the evaluation of the NFL Draft Advisory Board.

**STRENGTHS:** A massive big-bodied mauler with fluid feet, pure brute strength and exceptional athleticism for a man of his size. Excels at hand combat in the trenches, fending off pass-rush moves and preventing defenders from getting up in his chest. His power really stands out.

Does a great job keeping his legs churning upon initial contact and drives through the defender's body. Gets out in front of his runners on screens and bubbles as an aggressive second-level blocker. Praised by coaches for his strong work ethic; his consistent effort on every play shows up on film.

**WEAKNESSES:** Lack of height, which probably means a move back to the inside at the next level. A chugger moving down the line on pull blocks, he can be late to the spot. Durability could be somewhat of a concern, as he suffered a broken fibula in 2016 that ended his season prematurely and he gained an additional 40 pounds during the setback. He also missed two games in 2017 due to injury.

With just 21 career starts (14 at right tackle, seven at left guard), he lacks extensive experience compared to many of the other offensive line prospects in this class. And he'll have to be more precise with his leverage at the next level than what was required in the Big 12.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Dion Dawkins, Buffalo Bills — Viewed as a guard prospect coming out of college, he but could ultimately get an opportunity to play his college position of right tackle in the pros.

**Grade: 8.0**

### 2. CHRIS LINDSTROM, Boston College

6-3, 305 40 time: 5.17 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A handful of offensive linemen stood out during Senior Bowl week, but it was the nasty demeanor and tenacity that separated Lindstrom from others. It would not be a shock to see him in the first round.

Born to play football at "The Heights," Lindstrom grew up in a football family, as his dad played at Boston University, while his uncle played at Boston College and they would both go onto the NFL. His footwork is impressive, which allows him to be used in a variety of ways.

Lindstrom has started at both right tackle and right guard but projects as a guard at the next level. He finished his Eagles career with 48 consecutive starts and appears to be a solid Day 2 prospect.

**STRENGTHS:** A tremendous grappler who utilizes sound technique, along with an extremely quick first step off the snap of the ball, which allows him to win the initial leverage battle in the trenches most of the time. Possesses great balance, power and toughness.

Does a nice job on chip blocks and seeks out a second defender to get a body on, usually able to square up would-be tacklers; combo blocks are part of his deal. Takes pride in finishing and consistently seals off his blocking assignments in the run game. When BC needed key yards from running back AJ Dillon, it often ran behind Lindstrom.

**WEAKNESSES:** Tends to dive at opposing linemen on run plays at times and will totally whiff on occasion, allowing the opponent to have a clean path to the ball-carrier. Could stand to do a better job locating and executing second-level blocks faster and more efficiently. Doesn't possess elite size, and limited arm length creates some issues with allowing defenders to get up into his chest. Possesses average athleticism.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Tony Bergstrom, Washington Redskins — A similar player who would fit a power run scheme perfectly with his experience and understanding of how to operate on options/play-action.

**Grade: 7.9**

## FLASHBACK

It takes at least three years to determine the success or failure of draft picks

*Here's a snapshot of recent hits and misses*

**Diamond in the Rough**

**Graham Glasgow, Lions (Third round, 2016)**
The versatile Glasgow started 27 games at guard during his first two seasons in the Motor City before transitioning to center, where he started 16 games last year.

**Swing and Miss**

**Forrest Lamp, Chargers (Second round, 2017)**
Unable to stay out of the trainer's room, Lamp has appeared in just two games in two seasons; time is running out to prove his worth.

**Breakout Player**

**Dion Dawkins, Bills (Second round, 2017)**
Drafted as a guard, Dawkins emerged as the Bills' starting left tackle early in his rookie season and will be depended upon to protect Josh Allen's blind side.

### 3. MICHAEL DEITER, Wisconsin

6-5, 328 40 time: 5.36 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A four-year starter, Deiter brings a wealth of experience and ability to adapt to multiple positions. His high energy and competitiveness has been contagious to the Wisconsin offensive front line. NFL teams will love him for his consistency, durability and dependability. The team that drafts Deiter will hopefully have plenty of maple syrup stored for the occasion because he appears ready to serve up some pancakes on Sunday for the next decade.

Like many Badgers' blockers before him, Dieter possesses the broad frame and power to generate movement in tight quarters. His light feet and knee bend are traits that could allow Deiter to prove just as versatile in the NFL as he was over four years in Madison.

**STRENGTHS:** Versatility would best describe his collegiate career, demonstrating the ability to play multiple positions and the durability to set a school record with 53 career starts. His experience includes 23 starts at left guard, 16 at center and 14 at left tackle (plus one touchdown lined up at tight end vs. Illinois in 2017). His team-first mentality also earned him captain duties last season.

Sets a great example with his work ethic and attention to detail, a technician who is always looking to enhance his craft. He possesses a strong, wide stance that is hard for oncoming rushers to disrupt in pass protection and the athleticism necessary to be an effective pull blocker who seals off holes in the run game.

**WEAKNESSES:** Will tend to stay on a block a bit too long at times, allowing blitzing linebackers to shoot the gap. Struggled against speed while playing left tackle due to his short arms (for the position), an indication that he's best-suited to play inside. Will let smaller defenders get underneath his pads and get stood upright. Won't wow anyone with his physical testing, but his lunch-bucket mentality overcompensates for his timed speed. Weight has fluctuated between 310 to 330 pounds.

**Grade: 7.8**

### 4. MICHAEL JORDAN, Ohio State*

6-6, 310 40 time: 5.24 2nd-3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A big, overpowering presence, Jordan finished with 40 consecutive starts for his career at both guard and center, while becoming the first true freshman to start along the Ohio State offensive line since 1994 (Orlando Pace). He's better suited to play guard, which he has publicly acknowledged, as he is probably too tall to play center full time, although that versatility only enhances his draft value. Known for his silence and violence, Jordan stepped in ready to play on Day 1 in Columbus and appears ready to do so on the NFL.

**STRENGTHS:** Played two seasons at guard and one season at center, showing the ability to quickly adapt and be a team-first player. Coaches rave about his maturity and unselfishness. Possesses the build and strength to handle a bull rush and generates a strong push in the run game. In fact, his run-mauling tenacity may be his greatest asset. Showed quick acceleration off the snap and into his stance when lining up at guard. Also did a nice job reading the blitz and stunts when playing center.

**WEAKNESSES:** Didn't begin snapping until the summer of 2018, so he endured some growing pains with hiking the ball, with a handful of dangerous rollers and floaters. Speed could be one issue for him at the next level, has been beat with the spin move by more athletic pass-rushers on a few occasions. Being such a tall player, it's easy to understand how he can sometimes stand too upright.

**Grade: 7.5**

## PROTOTYPE

**✔ Run Blocking**

**Michael Jordan, Ohio State**
Quickness off the snap allows Jordan to rapidly get into the defender's chest and gain great leverage as a run mauler.

**✔ Pass Blocking**

**Cody Ford, Oklahoma**
Ford demonstrates footwork and athleticism, which might allow him an opportunity to stay at tackle at the next level.

**✔ Initial Quickness**

**Dru Samia, Oklahoma**
In addition to his great size, Samia shows outstanding quickness and fluid footwork on the interior.

**✔ Pulling/Trapping**

**Nate Herbig, Stanford**
The Cardinal utilized a number of stunts and trap blocks on the inside run, and Herbig was responsible for a large number of those seal blocks.

**✔ Downfield**

**Beau Benzschawel, Wisconsin**
Seeks out defenders in the second level with tenacity and intent. Benzschawel forces a linebacker to keep his head on a swivel.

**✔ Intangibles**

**Chris Lindstrom, Boston College**
When you envision an ideal guard in the NFL, one would imagine a player with a ferocious tenacity and nasty demeanor in the trenches.

### 5. CONNOR McGOVERN, Penn State*

6-4, 312 40 time: 5.19 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** His maximum value will be at guard at the next level, with the potential to thrive in a zone blocking scheme, which makes him an early-round target. McGovern anchored an offensive line that was more productive in 2018 than it was the previous year, despite the loss of running back Saquon Barkley (Giants), as the Nittany Lions rushed for 38 more yards per game and averaged 5.2 yards per carry (up from 4.9 the year before).

Started 34 of his 39 career games, including nine games at left guard as a freshman, before moving to center as a sophomore and switching to primarily right guard as a junior. He should end up being a reliable, consistent and versatile lineman with a great understanding of leverage and angles.

**STRENGTHS:** A highly intelligent player. Not a high-level athlete but possesses excellent balance and effectively turns defenders away from plays. He's a pure gamer who really sees the field, does a nice job of mirroring pass rushers and is very quick out of his stance. Demonstrates excellent hand placement and wins with leverage and speed on the interior. Leadership and versatility to play all three interior positions bode well for his draft stock.

**WEAKNESSES:** Will need to add more thickness to his frame to maximize his potential. He can anchor down but can be moved off his spot, so getting with a NFL strength and conditioning program is going to be very beneficial for his development. Would like to see him be more aggressive seeking out contact in the second level.

**Grade: 7.3**

### 6. BEAU BENZSCHAWEL, Wisconsin

6-5, 317 40 time: 5.28 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Should instantly help upgrade any team's running attack with his effectiveness to move defenders off their spot. With some experience playing tackle in college, Benzschawel will make his money on the inside at the next level due to his limitations. He might be expected to compete as a starter, but it might take a year or two to polish up some rough edges. Still, he would be considered one of the "safer" picks in this year's draft.

**STRENGTHS:** The ability to push defenders around and utilize strength, along with understanding angles, are best traits, which make him an exceptional run-mauler. Does a nice job releasing and getting out in front on screen plays. A capable pull blocker who can get down the line on pull blocks and takes good angles getting into the second level; he was a high school tight end. A four-year starter with 49 career starts under his belt.

His bloodlines at Wisconsin run deep, as both his father and uncle played at the school; his brother, Luke is currently a tight end on the team. Hails from a small town (Grafton, Wis.) with a population of 11,500.

**WEAKNESSES:** Needs to work on staying lower more consistently, which should help improve his pad level. Limited flexibility and stiff hips accounted for some struggles in pass protection when lined up at right tackle. Needs to work on footwork and kick-slide in order to become a more complete overall player.

**Grade: 7.2**

### 7. DRU SAMIA, Oklahoma

6-4, 305 40 time: 5.19 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Samia (pronounced suh-MEE-uh) is one of the more accomplished offensive line prospects in the nation and owns an impressive resume, which includes 42 career starts. He started at right tackle as a true freshman, made the switch to right guard during his sophomore season (played 597 snaps that year without allowing a sack) and has remained there ever since. He's an athletic, agile lineman who can play in RPO-heavy type of offense that requires pre-snap diagnostics and plenty of movement.

**STRENGTHS:** Exceptional athlete who consistently stays low and has a good understanding of his job responsibility from play-to-play. Demonstrates sound technique and strong hand placement. Excels on pull blocks, can get down the line in a jiffy and does a nice job sealing off blocks. A three-year starter in the Big 12, who played in an extremely complex offensive system, which bodes well for his experience when transitioning to the next level.

He was presented with the Don Key Award, the highest honor that an Oklahoma player can receive, which goes to the player who exemplifies Key's qualities on and off the field. Key was an All-Big-8 guard and potential All-American until cancer surgery ended his football career in 1981.

**WEAKNESSES:** Seems to be a little late off the snap of the ball; would like to see him work on his get-off. Doesn't embrace contact with authority when seeking out linebackers in the second level. Can tend to give up ground against bigger, stronger opposing linemen in pass protection; wouldn't hurt for him to bulk up a bit at the next level. Says he can work on being more patient as a blocker.

**Grade: 7.2**

### 8. NATE DAVIS, Charlotte

6-3, 317 40 time: 5.27 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Davis had other scholarship offers but he wanted to play for Charlotte, a fledging program that just finished up its sixth season of college football last year. He played mostly defense growing up until making the switch to offense during his sophomore season in high school, so his aggressive style of play certainly stands out. He really stood out in one-on-one drills during the week of Senior Bowl, which could deliver a boost to his draft stock.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses great strength; plays bigger than his size and demonstrates natural football instincts, to go along with impressive athleticism. His footwork and quickness really stand out as two areas of strength. He's able to seek out linebackers in the second level by taking good angles and does a nice job sealing off the edge. Has experience starting at guard and tackle as a four-year starter. Sound technique means he could make seamless transition to the next level.

**WEAKNESSES:** Many teams view him as a guard due to lack of height and short arms. Played on a losing football program that didn't see many scouts make the on-campus visit, so has flown a bit under the radar. Was ruled academically ineligible as a freshman. Has gained about 30 pounds since the start of his collegiate career and a team will need to make sure he can maintain bulk and not lose any speed.

**Grade: 7.1**

### 9. NATE HERBIG, Stanford*

6-3, 334 40 time: 5.47 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The Honolulu native known as "Big Island" is just the second offensive lineman from Stanford to start as a true freshman since 2000. He has had to fill in at right tackle on occasion due to injuries along the offensive line, but his home in the NFL will be strictly at guard. Built like a refrigerator, Herbig possesses lots of quality traits but will likely need some seasoning before he can battle for a starting job at the next level.

**STRENGTHS:** A mammoth man; excels in run blocking and is difficult to get around. Able to knock down multiple defenders like bowling pins on any single play. Nimble feet and surprising athleticism allows him to get down the line quickly for his size. Extremely smart player who picks up stunts well, makes few mental errors and is rarely flagged. A mauler with fancy footwork, and coaches love the fact that he is rarely flagged and makes few mental errors.

**WEAKNESSES:** Played just seven games in 2018 due to undisclosed injuries, one of the multiple factors why his running back Bryce Love struggled this past season. Poor balance leads him to playing much smaller than his size suggests. Needs to be more violent and physical with his hand combat. Appears lackadaisical at times, taking plays off. Has trimmed down some, as he was close to 350 pounds, so watching and maintaining a healthy playing weight could be challenging.

**Grade: 7.0**

### 10. JAVON PATTERSON, Mississippi

6-2, 310 40-time: 5.32 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Patterson has proven to hold his own against many NFL-caliber players as a four-year starter in the SEC. A well-built lineman who possesses a thick lower-body with thighs built like wine barrels. He has started at every interior offensive line position, so he provides additional value due to his versatility.

What he might lack in athleticism, he'll make up for in the strength department. He's a high-level player when everything is clicking, but while he does possess starter traits, his lack of hustle may be a red flag and prevent him from being a full-time starter at the next level.

**STRENGTHS:** Creates tremendous push with his country-strong strength and long arms. Owns quick, powerful hands and is quick to fire out of his stance. Thrives in pass protection with ability to paw defenders off. Extremely stout at the point of attack, he is not easily moved. An excellent student who has been active in the community. Was named to the SEC Football Community Service Team twice for his work off the field.

**WEAKNESSES:** Doesn't move well in space. Fails to improvise as the play progresses; he'll sit in his spot for too long when he should be out seeking defenders. Too many plays where he fails to get a body on a body. Would like to see him consistently play through the whistle. Tends to hop-skip down the line on pull blocks; will need some footwork refinement. Suffered a shoulder injury in the spring of 2017 that required surgery.

**Grade: 6.7**

### 11. BEN POWERS, Oklahoma

6-3, 313 40 time: 5.12 5th-6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A transfer from Butler Community College (where he started at right tackle), Powers had zero scholarship offers coming out of high school. He was dominant upon his arrival at Norman. Did not allow a single sack during his senior campaign on his way to being named a consensus All-American, helping the Sooners win the Joe Moore Award, given to best offensive line in college football.

The Outland Trophy semifinalist has started at both guard positions and plays with a nasty mean streak in the trenches that just irks the opposition. And with so many NFL teams mimicking the Sooners' offensive scheme, he should have no problem transitioning to the next level.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses a hard-nosed demeanor and is a high-motor player who goes all out until the whistle on every play. Knows and executes his assignments well and has a good understanding of hand placement and hand combat. Showcases a strong, wide base in pass protection and has quick feet. While he doesn't necessarily overpower opponents, he does a great job of holding blocks and creating openings. Showed his toughness by playing through nagging injuries and rarely allowing a sack.

**WEAKNESSES:** Lacks size compared to other guard prospects in this class. Short arms and limited athleticism are noticeable on film. Will tend to get stood upright at times in one-on-one pass blocking. Will sometimes take poor angles when seeking out defenders in space; needs to slow down the aggression and be more precise when seeking out linebackers.

**Grade: 6.3**

### 12. PHIL HAYNES, Wake Forest

6-3, 310 40 time: 5.08 5th-6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** One of the most heart-touching stories you'll hear about leading up to the draft, Haynes grew up with a disabled mother and was aided by a Raleigh man who was inspired by the movie "The Blind Side" and paid for his private-school tuition. He arrived at Winston-Salem as a 250-pound defensive end and departed as a 310-pound (17 percent body fat) NFL guard prospect.

**STRENGTHS:** Extremely physical player with natural brute strength, able to generate great push at the point of attack. Has plenty of experience as a four-year

## SPOTLIGHT

## Dru Samia, Oklahoma

***How would you describe your style of play?*** Intensity would be the biggest deal. (Oklahoma) Coach (Lincoln) Riley did a great job preaching to finish past the whistle, so I feel like you will find that in any five of us that has played at Oklahoma.

***On the field, something clicks. You have that nasty mentality. What's the fire?*** I think it kind of goes hand-in-hand. I'm so docile and nice off the field because I'm able to let out my frustrations on the field. I was taught there was a time and place to let your emotions roll, and on the football field you don't really get blamed for it.

***How was the agent selection process for you; what factors did you weigh when making your decision?*** I'm sure it's different for everybody. In my case, I decided who I felt the guy I was most comfortable with as a person. Someone who did the process as far as reaching out to me the right way. There were a few people who I felt didn't do it the most trustworthy way or straightforward way, so I was looking for someone who was going to come straight to me first and be straight up with me and honest and that's who I went with.

***It seems many NFL teams are mimicking the Sooners offense, do you think that is beneficial for you?*** Yeah, I think so. Obviously we are going to be running a lot of techniques that Coach had us running all four years, so hopefully I can find some similarities in the offense. I'm sure there will be and it'll help me pick up the playbook a little bit faster. ... Our offense was asked to do a lot of different things; we added a lot more power running.

***How much did winning the Joe Moore Award mean the whole unit?*** It was amazing. Those guys we came in with — Bobby (Evans), Cody (Ford), Ben (Powers) the year after — we were all just bright-eyed young guys, not knowing what was going to happen. To win that award after all those years together ... it was awesome."

PHOTO BY AP PHOTO/BRAD TOLLEFSON

starter with 47 career starts, lining up at right tackle as a freshman, kicking inside to right guard as a sophomore and holding down the left guard spot during his final two seasons. Was a team captain and leader of the "Beef Boys," a nickname for their highly talented offensive line. His basketball background is apparent in his athleticism and fundamentals.

**WEAKNESSES:** Needs to eliminate habit of lunging when blocking out in space, which has resulted in him whiffing on occasion and allowing the defender to make the play. Still relatively raw, didn't play football until his senior season of high school. Was switched to offensive line as a freshman and had to learn a new position, so there is room for him to grow and polish up some of his technique.

**Grade: 6.0**

### 13. HJALTE FROHOLDT, Arkansas

6-4, 315 40 time: 5.26 5th-6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The Denmark native began playing football competitively in the United States during his sophomore year of high school as a foreign exchange student in Ohio (he can speak three languages: English, German and Dutch). He was later coached by former Florida State Heisman-winning quarterback Chris Weinke at IMG and arrived to Fayetteville as a defensive tackle before transitioning to offensive line during the spring of 2016.

He since emerged as one of the top interior offensive lineman in the country and is expected to receive heavy interest starting in the middle rounds of the draft due to his potential to become a well-rounded blocker. He has a strong interior presence and should test well before the draft.

**STRENGTHS:** Big, powerful frame with long arms, which he utilizes well to gain leverage and knock defenders off balance. A strong mauler in the run game, able to move bodies and push piles. Weight-room warrior who can squat 650 pounds and power clean 375 pounds. Gained valuable experience as a senior playing some center early on in the season due to injuries on the team, and he was inserted onto special teams to help strengthen the blocking units. Enjoyed a two-season stretch in which he allowed just one sack.

**WEAKNESSES:** Is a bit slow and awkward at times when stunting, will need to improve his footwork and quickness. Tends to give up ground more easily in pass protection. Needs to stay more consistent in keeping his body square to his opponent when blocking on the move.

**Grade: 5.9**

### 14. CHUMA EDOGA, USC

6-4, 303 40 time: 5.07 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A firecracker who is sure to give opponents the business after the whistle, there is no quit in his game. Edoga was one of the standouts during Senior Bowl week but injuries in the past few seasons pushed his draft stock into the Day 3 range. The nimble big man played tackle at USC but is viewed as a guard by many talent observers.

**STRENGTHS:** He flashes tremendous athleticism, along with quick feet, which enables him to do a fine job mirroring opponents. Demonstrates excellent lateral quickness and strong leg drive when run blocking. Understands how to walk his blocking assignment out of the play. Teams will value his combination of athleticism and effort.

**WEAKNESSES:** A sprained ankle in 2017 cost him two games and a hyper-extended knee in 2018 caused him to miss another pair of games, so durability is one concern. He was ejected and suspended one game in 2016 for making contact with a referee, although the ref initiated the brunt of the contact. While he may lose a few battles against some of the bigger, stronger defensive lineman, his energy and high motor allows for quick recovery. Needs to hone his technique

**Grade: 5.7**

## 3 TO WATCH

### SLEEPER

**Hjalte Froholdt, Arkansas**
The Denmark native has surprisingly been flying under the radar leading up to the draft, but his versatility and strength are viewed as huge assets.

### COULD DISAPPOINT

**Michael Deiter, Wisconsin**
He looked rather ordinary at the Senior Bowl and was beaten badly during one-on-one drills, leaving lingering doubts about how well his skill-set translates to the NFL.

### SMALL SCHOOL STUD

**Nate Davis, Charlotte**
Davis started 37 games for the 49ers at tackle but is expected to kick inside in the pros due to his lack of size and small-school pedigree.

### 15. OLI UDOH, Elon

6-5, 327 40 time: 5.43 6th-7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Teams looking for a developmental tackle prospect will give Udoh a hard, long look. His stout play at the East-West Shrine Game earned him an invite to the Senior Bowl, where he did receive some reps at guard. A four-year starter, Udoh is an agile left tackle, who has proven to be a dependable pass and run blocker during his career. While he has never played guard, it may ultimately be where he winds up cementing himself.

**STRENGTHS:** Massive size and extremely long arms are very noticeable upon first impression. Flexes his great strength and powerful leg drive in the run game. His reach allows him to keep pass-rushers at bay and he has shown surprising agility. Possesses next level strength (can squat over 600 pounds) and his athleticism should give him a shot to remain at tackle.

**WEAKNESSES:** Once weighed as much as 384 pounds in college. Has since taken upon himself to get into better physical shape, but making sure he doesn't balloon up again will be one concern. His hand placement and technique will need refinement. Brings plenty of energy but seems to be lacking that top gear of aggressiveness and fails to make the punishing blow. He is mud-running slow.

**Grade: 5.5**

### 16. GREG BRUMFIELD, LSU

6-2, 299 40 time: 5.14, 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** While he didn't earn a full-time starting job until his junior year, Brumfield did manage to receive 1,000 game snaps through his first three seasons and emerged as the Tigers' top lineman as a senior. He plays with a chip on his shoulder and projects as a valuable backup who can step in and hold the fort, but isn't likely to be a regular starter.

**STRENGTHS:** An athletic, physical lineman who plays much bigger than his size. True technician who takes pride in his film study and is also one of the strongest players on the team, according to his coaches. Demonstrates excellent hand placement and effective helmet-to-hip helps out blocker on double teams. Key team leader with his ironman play and menacing demeanor. Known by his teammates simply as "Bruiser."

**WEAKNESSES:** Will gamble in the second level and dive at oncoming defenders, rather than squaring up and getting pads on pads due to his poor angles. Despite his aggressiveness, he will be very susceptible to some of the mammoths that reside in the NFL and could be forced to deal with players 40-50 pounds heavier on a regular basis. Missed several games as a senior due to a knee injury.

**Grade: 5.4**

### 17. ALEX BARS, Notre Dame

6-5, 312 40-time: 5.27, 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The Nashville native is a medically flagged player who could fall in the draft due to his past injury history. He slid into the left guard spot this season and appeared to be a much more polished player with improved technique and pad level prior to his injury. He likely projects as a Day 3 pick with upside should he be able to capture his previous form. However, his pending medical status surrounding his leg injury could ultimately dictate his draft fate.

**STRENGTHS:** Does an excellent job sealing off holes with footwork and leverage in the run game. He can stonewall the bull rush and stave off blitzing linebackers. A feisty dog in the trenches; he'll knock you down and continue to give you the business. A team captain and strong bloodlines; hails from a football family, including his dad and two brothers, all of whom have played major college football. Did a solid job starting at right tackle in 2016 and allowed just one sack in 830 snaps the following season, starting at right guard. Relegated to the sidelines due to injury, players and coaches both praised his passion and energy throughout the season, acting as an additional coach while rehabbing.

**WEAKNESSES:** While not the most fleet-footed, he does make up for it with his high motor. A torn ACL and MCL injury suffered during the early part of the 2018 season, in addition to a broken left ankle suffered in 2015, is sure to dent his draft stock. Could his ultra-aggressive style of play make him more prone to injury?

**Grade: 5.3**

## WORTH WATCHING

**Deion Calhoun, Mississippi State (6-3, 320)**
A three-year starter who was never outmatched playing in the SEC.

**Tyler Jones, NC State (6-3, 306)**
All-ACC performer expected to move from OT.

**Terronne Prescod, NC State (6-4, 334)**
"Big T" is a wide-bodied mauler who made great strides this past year.

**Bunchy Stallings, Kentucky (6-2, 305)**
A key cog in the Wildcats' outstanding, run-based offensive attack.

**Frederick Johnson, Florida (6-5, 330)**
Possesses great size and has started at both guard and tackle.

**Zack Bailey, South Carolina (6-5, 314)**
A broken fibula suffered in December damped his draft stock.

*For further analysis of the 2019 guards, visit www.nfldraftscout.com.*

# Centers

PHOTO BY WILLIAM HOWARD/ICON SPORTSWIRE | ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA AP IMAGES

**OVERVIEW** There have been just six centers selected in the first round of the NFL Draft since the start of the decade, fewer than any other position in the NFL. Last year saw two chosen in Round 1 — Frank Ragnow (Lions) and Billy Price (Bengals), who mostly played guard as a rookie for Cincinnati.

While no clear-cut center has emerged as a consensus first-round pick, several prospects have star quality written all over them. North Carolina State's Garrett Bradbury and Mississippi State's Elgton Jenkins appear to be two immediate difference-makers. The physical Jenkins possesses experience at every position, while Bradbury may have played himself into the first-round conversation with a dominant showing at the Senior Bowl.

It's possible that this year's class gets shut out of the first round, but it does have quality depth, with several mid- to late-round players who could develop into starters down the road.

**2019 CLASS GRADE**

**B**

### 1. GARRETT BRADBURY, NC State

6-2, 298 40 time: 5.00 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The Rimington Trophy winner as the nation's top center was originally recruited as a 250-pound tight end, and he showed off some of his athleticism last season, lining up for a 1-yard rushing touchdown against East Carolina. Bradbury gave defensive tackle a shot before settling into his role as a guard and eventually made the transition to center during his junior season.

He was the best center at the Senior Bowl and his skill-set suggests he can be an immediate plug-and-play starter in the NFL, possibly thriving in a zone-blocking scheme due to his lateral ability.

**STRENGTHS:** He is a versatile and agile offensive lineman who brings a certified toughness. He's a knee-and-hip bender with great flexibility and good hand placement. Possesses fundamentally sound technique, solid footwork, along with great balance and body control. A team captain; praised for his great leadership by coaches, teammates and his quarterback.

Ability to block on the move makes him an effective second-level blocker in the run game. Didn't allow a quarterback pressure during senior season. His initial quickness and agility often really stands out on tape.

**WEAKNESSES:** Struggles to generate push and will need to gain some upper-body strength in order to prepare for the bigger, stronger defensive linemen at the next level. Dealt with a shoulder injury during his freshman season. Has had some wild snaps out of shotgun that were off the mark.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Corey Linsley, Green Bay Packers — An agile, finesse blocker who benefits from playing in a zone blocking scheme but is equally valuable in pass and run blocking.

**Grade: 7.8**

### 2. DALTON RISNER, Kansas State

6-4, 308 40 time: 5.08 2nd round

*Denotes underclassman

## FLASHBACK

It takes at least three years to determine the success or failure of draft picks

*Here's a snapshot of recent hits and misses*

**Diamond in the Rough**

**Pat Elflein, Vikings (Third round, 2017)**
Has done a phenomenal job manning the middle for the Vikings, starting 27 games during his first two seasons, which is solid production from a third-round pick.

**Swing and Miss**

**Max Tuerk, Chargers/Cardinals (Third round, 2016)**
The 66th overall player chosen in the 2016 draft, Tuerk was released by two organizations in a two-year span and was out of the league last season.

**Breakout Player**

**Mason Cole, Cardinals (Third round, 2018)**
A polished player, Cole was able to step in immediately and start all 16 games for the Cardinals as a rookie; he is considered a key piece in their rebuilding phase.

**IN OUR VIEW:** A three-time team captain, his leadership characteristics and experience playing in a power-style offense should appeal to NFL scouts. As an offensive tackle, he lacks the eye-popping athleticism to consistently protect the edge at the professional level, where he might get embarrassed on occasion by some speedy pass-rushers. But Risner is a blue-collar brawler whose thick frame and competitive nature make him perfectly suited to a move back to the interior, while playing right tackle isn't out of the question.

**STRENGTHS:** Able to keep defenders at bay due to great arm length and allowed very few sacks throughout his college career. Demonstrates sound technique; mirrors defenders well in pass protection, while making sure he seeks out a body in the run game as an effective second-level blocker. Despite his athletic limitations, he did an admirable job when asked to do quite a bit of pulling.

**WEAKNESSES:** A four-year starter who had his streak of 38 consecutive starts snapped when he missed the 2017 Cactus Bowl due to shoulder surgery. In fact, he has nursed injuries in both shoulders. He can tend to be a bit over-aggressive and get caught out of position. In addition, his footwork is subpar and he has been gobbled up by some of the top pass-rushers (see, Montez Sweat).

**Grade: 7.7**

### 3. ELGTON JENKINS, Mississippi State

6-4, 310 40 time: 5.34 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Nicknamed "Big E," he moved to center in 2017 but has also started games at left tackle, left guard and right tackle. Was called the eyes, ears and brains of the offense last season by Mississippi State head coach Joe Moorhead, which is high praise considering the Bulldogs had some standouts on offense. Jenkins allowed just one sack over his final two seasons starting at center.

Leadership and experience playing multiple positions (not to mention his back-to-back SEC All-Academic honors) suggest he possesses the smarts NFL teams expect at the pivot. Physically and athletically, Jenkins is one of the safest players in this year's draft.

**STRENGTHS:** Intelligent player who makes all the right pre-snap reads and creates tremendous push, using his strength to knock defenders off the ball. Plays with terrific knee bend and possesses excellent core strength, allowing him to hold up to powerful bull rushes. Most impressive is his vice-like strength and effective jab punch. At times, he'll simply just toss defenders

aside on his way to the second level.

Game tape shows that the game sometimes appears to come easy to Jenkins, who accelerates and changes direction quickly for a big man, blocking 10 to 20 yards on some of the many QB runs called to take advantage of QB Nick Fitzgerald.

Versatility is a big part of his game, as Jenkins started 26 times at center, five times at left tackle, twice at left guard and once at right tackle. He's rarely ever called for a penalty.

**WEAKNESSES:** Was arrested during an assault on campus in 2015 (he was reportedly a witness to the altercation), but otherwise has had a clean slate off the field for the remainder of his career. On the field, needs to work on keeping his legs driving until the whistle. He endured some snapping issues in 2017, but seemed to curtail that issue as a senior.

He did struggle in a high-profile matchup last season against Alabama. And some NFL coaches might demand a higher level of intensity playing in the trenches — he's so smooth that sometimes his demeanor can appear to be laissez-faire.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Billy Price, Cincinnati Bengals — Perhaps the three most underrated elements of center play — smarts, the ability to anchor and hand strength — are all areas in which Jenkins excels.

**Grade: 7.6**

### 4. ERIK McCOY, Texas A&M*

6-3, 315 40 time: 5.36 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** He was a three-year starter and team captain who started every game at center in 2018, helping the Aggies average 471.6 yards per game. He showed his grit and toughness playing through injuries, while never missing a game. With his bachelor's degree in hand, the redshirt junior decided to jump to the pros.

He possesses starter traits and has a bit more size than most centers; he'll immediately upgrade an offense's run game. He should be able to step in and play guard at a high level, too, as needed.

**STRENGTHS:** Excellent size and strength, along with sound technique. Plays with a low center of gravity, sound pad level and hand placement. His thick lower body enables him to hold his ground well against most. He has improved his mirror skills in pass protection and showcases the ability to be an effective combo blocker. Flashes exceptional balance and power, able to pave big holes with leverage.

**WEAKNESSES:** Needs to become a more consistent snapper out of the shotgun formation; has endured occasional lapses. Can be easily avoided by more agile linebackers in open space and will sometimes miss second-level assignment; slow feet.

**Grade: 7.4**

### 5. ROSS PIERSCHBACHER, Alabama

6-3, 309 40 time: 5.21 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** You won't find many college players with more experience and swag than Pierschbacher, an All-SEC first-team selection who made 42 career starts at left guard before sliding over to center for 2018. His proven resume and versatility to play all three interior offensive line positions make him an early-to-mid-round prospect. A potential NFL comparison is to Pat Elflein of the Minnesota Vikings. Just like Elflein at Ohio State, Pierschbacher primarily played guard before making the move to the middle, which projects as his best position.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses fundamentally sound technique overall and is quick off the snap into his stance. Has gone entire seasons without being flagged for a penalty, which speaks volumes about his discipline and is one of many reasons why he earned the distinction of being one of the Crimson Tide's four team captains last season.

**WEAKNESSES:** Limited flexibility, which causes him to struggle against highly athletic pass rushers. Needs to be more consistent staying low out of his stance and is still learning the nuances of the position, having played just one season at center.

**Grade: 7.1**

## PROTOTYPE

**✔ Run Blocking**

**Erik McCoy, Texas A&M**
Any team looking for an instant upgrade in their run game should search no further than McCoy, who was the anchor of the Aggies' bruising offense.

**✔ Pass Blocking**

**Elgton Jenkins, Mississippi State**
With great bend and strength, Jenkins understands the use of hand placement and creates excellent leverage with his arm length.

**✔ Quickness**

**Garrett Bradbury, NC State**
An exceptional athlete, Bradbury blends tremendous speed and quickness along with his strength at his position, plus sound technique.

**✔ Pulling/Trapping**

**Ross Pierschbacher, Alabama**
The Crimson Tide utilized Pierschbacher in array of ways at all three interior positions, which often required him to set up traps in the run game; he can also get down the line in a hurry.

**✔ Downfield**

**Toa Lobendahn, USC**
When healthy, Lobendahn may be the best athlete of the bunch and is able to get into the second level swiftly to seek out defenders.

**✔ Intangibles**

**Lamont Gaillard, Georgia**
He has played nearly every position along the line and was a staple on the Bulldogs front line, which featured a balanced offensive attack.

### 6. LAMONT GAILLARD, Georgia

6-2, 308 40 time: 5.32 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Gaillard (pronounced GILL-yard) arrived in Athens as a defensive lineman. He would switch to guard, where he made 13 starts as a sophomore, before finishing up his final two seasons at center, making an additional 29 starts in the middle. He works hard on every play and has a fiery streak in the trenches, while showing good understanding of the nuances of the center spot, despite limited time at the position.

**STRENGTHS:** Physical, competitive and well respected in the locker room, his ability to diagnose pre-snap reads is one of his best attributes. Durability and toughness are two other areas scouts admire, as he has gutted through various injuries, while showing great stamina. His strength and agility allow him to pave lanes for his runners.

**WEAKNESSES:** He initially struggled with snapping the ball in shotgun but harnessed some of his woes. He never played center until college, so the position is still relatively new compared to some other prospects. He continues to work on improving his technique.

**Grade: 7.0**

### 7. SAM MUSTIPHER, Notre Dame

6-2, 306 40 time: 5.19 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A gritty player who proved to be a major force, Mustipher finished his Fighting Irish career with 38 consecutive starts. The Maryland native compiled some impressive film over the past few years. He'll need to continue to get bigger, stronger and more aggressive, but he possesses traits such as leadership and smarts to develop into an eventual starter at the next level.

**STRENGTHS:** A smart, athletic player with good athleticism and the ability to be an effective second-level blocker. The team captain had stretches of entire seasons without allowing a sack. His experience allows him to dissect pre-snap coverages and help his quarterback make the right reads. Intense work ethic during practice rubs off on teammates, according to his coaches.

**WEAKNESSES:** He can be pushed around by some of the bigger, stronger defensive linemen, so getting into an NFL strength and conditioning program should help his development. Will allow defenders to get in close to his chest and lose leverage at times. Would like to see him finish seal blocks stronger.

**Grade: 6.5**

### 8. TOA LOBENDAHN, USC

6-2, 295 40 time: 4.96 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A high-character player who overcame plenty of adversity during his collegiate career. Was elected team captain by teammates. Hails from a football family (dad played at Utah and coached at BYU). More of a finesse blocker, but his experience playing nearly every offensive line position makes him an asset as a utility lineman.

**STRENGTHS:** Has started at four positions along the offensive line, including 18 starts at left tackle. Holds his ground well against the bigger pass-rushers. Shows exceptional quickness when healthy and has demonstrated admirable toughness, playing through several injuries, even finishing one game despite a torn ACL.

**WEAKNESSES:** Has had some mental lapses with penalties and issues with snapping the ball, including a major blunder that cost USC the game against California during his final season. Doesn't possesses great size. Can go down too easily at times upon contact in the second level. Has had two season-ending injuries and three knee surgeries; battled through a pectoral injury in 2018.

**Grade: 6.0**

## WORTH WATCHING

**Ryan Anderson, Wake Forest (6-5, 305)**
Has the experience and know-how to play every offensive line position.

**Lo Falemaka, Utah (6-4, 295)**
A six-year senior whose solid play was marred by injuries.

**Alec Eberle, Florida State (6-3, 295)**
Finished with 44 consecutive starts at center for Seminoles.

*For further analysis of the 2019 centers, visit www.nfldraftscout.com.*

# Defensive Ends

**OVERVIEW** The 2019 draft is blessed with a remarkable collection of defensive linemen — a group that two-time NFL general manager Scot McCloughan describes as the best he's seen in his 25-plus years of scouting.

It is both unusually gifted at the top — with talents like Ohio State's Nick Bosa, Michigan's Rashan Gary and Clemson's Clelin Ferrell — and boasts intriguing Day 2 and later-round projects who, with a little polish, could wind up becoming NFL starters and stars. This includes Senior Bowl standouts like Texas' prototypically-built Charles Omenihu, Boston College's Zach Allen or Louisiana Tech's Jaylon Ferguson.

Unlike recent years with top talents like No. 1 overall pick Myles Garrett (Cleveland Browns, 2017) or 2018's top edge rusher Bradley Chubb (whom the Denver Broncos nabbed fifth overall), this year's gifted class does come with its share of red flags. Not even top prospects like Bosa (injury), Gary (inconsistency) or Ferrell (average athleticism) enter the process without questions, making the pre-draft process of medical exams, interviews and workouts (in that order) critical in determining the final pecking order of a tightly packed collection of edge rushers.

What will be obvious throughout the 2019 draft is the need NFL teams feel for adding pass rushers to combat today's explosive offenses. Only two first-round picks were invested in true defensive ends a year ago (Chubb and the Saints' Marcus Davenport), with only one more traditional edge rusher (Titans OLB Harold Landry) making the top 50 picks.

That number is expected to triple (at least) this spring.

**2019 CLASS GRADE**
**A-**

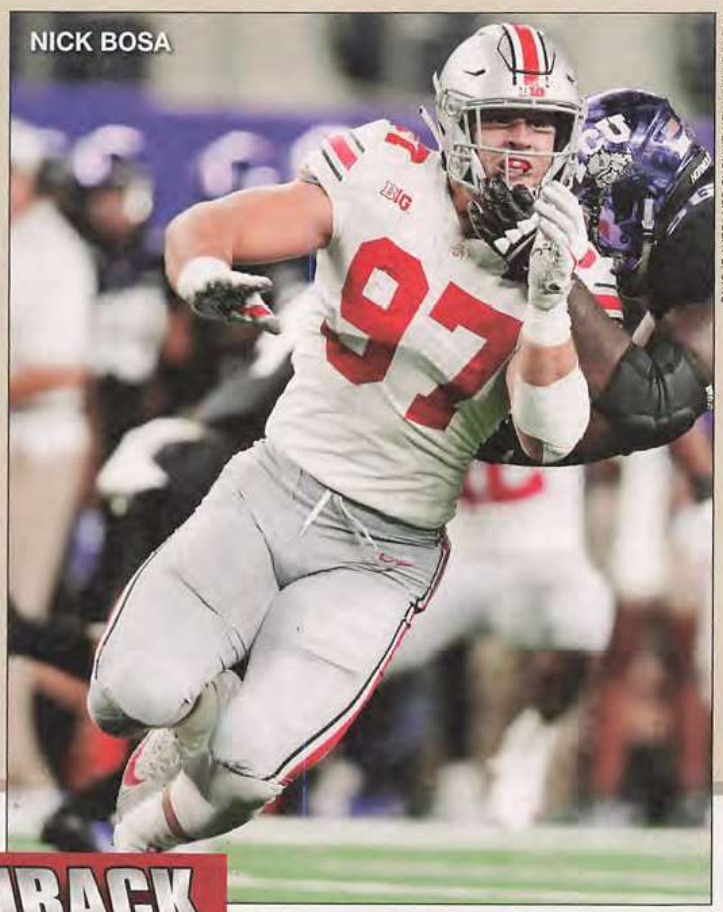


PHOTO BY MATTHEW EMMONS-USA TODAY SPORTS

*Denotes underclassman

### 1. NICK BOSA, Ohio State*

6-4, 263 40 time: 4.76 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The bloodlines have always been part of the allure with Nick, who is now sure to follow his father John Bosa, uncle Erik Kumerow and, of course, older brother, Joey, into the NFL, all via the first round.

The spotlight is nothing new for Nick, who, bloodlines or not, was tabbed as a five-star talent at Florida's St. Thomas Aquinas High School — one of the richest recruiting beds in the country. He wasted no time living up to expectations at Ohio State, ranking second on a talented Buckeyes squad in sacks with five as a true freshman before exploding as a sophomore for 16 tackles for loss and 8.5 sacks. Bosa was chosen the Big Ten's Defensive Lineman of the Year in 2017 and an American Football Coaches Association first-team All-American.

A core muscle injury suffered against TCU in the third game of the season abruptly ended Bosa's 2018 campaign after a dominating start. Bosa was leading the Buckeyes with 14 tackles, six tackles for loss, four sacks and two fumble recoveries (including one for a touchdown) through roughly three halves of football (as Ohio State blew out Oregon State and Rutgers).

The comparisons to his older brother were everywhere. With similar frames, the Bosa brothers play with a similar brand of controlled chaos that consistently results in big plays. As noted by Nick's official bio at Ohio State, the two had virtually identical stats through 30 games: Joey had 34.5 tackles for loss and Nick had 29.0; Joey had 21.0 sacks and Nick had 17.5. The difference: Nick accomplished his production in roughly 600 fewer snaps.

Like his older brother, Bosa is a plug-and-play Pro Bowl-caliber edge rusher who — barring complications with his medical evaluation — would shock no one as the No. 1 pick in the draft.

**STRENGTHS:** Carved from granite. While perhaps lacking elite height or arm length, Bosa's compact frame makes him pound-for-pound one of the most powerful players in the 2019 draft. Shows the quick-twitch explosiveness to explode out of his stance as well as excellent snap anticipation, frequently beating college tackles with a pure speed rush. Unlike many rocked-up players, Bosa shows good core flexibility to bend around the corner while maintaining — and even building upon — his speed.

Stalks his target like a lion on the prowl, deftly moving through traffic and pouncing on his prey with startling speed and explosive power. Complements his exciting physical attributes with terrific technique, including an array of pass rush moves, using his hands — and the timing of his hands — as well as any edge rusher in the country to knock blockers off balance.

## FLASHBACK

**It takes at least three years to determine the success or failure of draft picks**

*Here's a snapshot of recent hits and misses*

### Diamond in the Rough

**Romeo Okwara, Detroit (Undrafted, 2016)**
Okwara originally signed with the Giants out of Notre Dame, seeing the field as a backup over his first two NFL seasons. He joined the Lions last year and wound up leading the team with 7.5 sacks while starting 14 games.

### Swing and Miss

**Charles Harris, Dolphins (First round, 2017)**
The polar opposite of Okwara is Harris, who has started just three of 27 games and recorded three sacks since the Dolphins invested the 22nd overall pick in him two years ago.

### Breakout Player

**Sam Hubbard, Bengals (Third round, 2018)**
Those looking for a player on the verge of big things should keep an eye on Hubbard, who didn't start a game as a rookie, yet led all first-year defensive ends with six sacks.

## PROTOTYPE

### ✔ Pass Rush

**Nick Bosa, Ohio State**
No edge rusher is more frightening off the edge than Bosa, who can beat tackles with his initial burst, power or a wicked array of pass-rush moves.

### ✔ Run Defense

**Clelin Ferrell, Clemson**
While perhaps best known for his 27 career sacks, Ferrell's length and strength allow him to anchor at the point of attack, and his underrated athleticism helps him string plays out wide.

### ✔ Explosion

**Montez Sweat, Mississippi State**
As quick off the snap as any edge rusher in this class. Despite measuring 6-6, 252 pounds, Sweat also shows awesome raw power, flashing a one-armed punch that knocked some would-be blockers in Mobile to the turf.

### ✔ Strength

**Rashan Gary, Michigan**
Physically ready to play in the NFL when he signed with Michigan as the top-rated prep according to some recruiting experts, Gary combines a powerful upper and lower body to dominate opponents.

### ✔ Tacking

**Zach Allen, Boston College**
Given that he recorded a staggering 161 tackles (including 30.5 tackles for loss) over the past two seasons, it is hard to overlook Allen's instincts, toughness and long, strong arms as a tackler.

### ✔ Intangibles

**John Cominsky, Charleston**
Cominsky is an easy player to root for, as he signed with Charleston as a 215-pound option quarterback and built himself into a monster defensive end who earned a trip to the Senior Bowl and Combine. He is trying to be the first player from his school to be drafted into the NFL.

Shows excellent coordination between his upper and lower body, timing his swipe with lateral dekes to cleanly wrap the corner. Plays with terrific knee bend and pad level to play bigger and stronger at the point of attack. Comfortable on stunts back to the inside, showing zero hesitancy against the bigger bodies.

**WEAKNESSES:** Looks maxed out physically and already plays with stellar technique, raising some question as to how much better he can get in the NFL. Looks shorter on tape than his listed size. Just average length to disrupt quarterbacks while being blocked, forcing just two fumbles and deflecting just two passes in 29 career games. Played in just three games in 2018, undergoing surgery to repair torn core muscles near his abdomen and groin that abruptly ended his college career, requiring a thorough check by NFL doctors. Raised some eyebrows with his decision to shut it down and prepare for the draft rather than rehabilitate and help Ohio State pursue a national championship.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Cameron Wake, Miami Dolphins — It would be too easy to compare Nick to his older brother, Joey, so let's go back to the same franchise that drafted the eldest Bosa, father John, and now features Wake, a five-time Pro Bowler with 98 sacks over 10 NFL seasons. At 6-3, 263 pounds, Wake lacks ideal size, but his suddenness and underrated strength have made him an NFL star after he initially was overlooked at this level and had to cut his teeth in the CFL. Needless to say, Nick won't have to take the circuitous route to get to the NFL, but he may use the motivation of being tagged as Joey's "little brother" as motivation the way Wake has had a chip on his shoulder with Miami.

**Grade: 8.4**

## 2. CLELIN FERRELL, Clemson*

6-5, 265 40 time: 4.78 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** There might be edge rushers drafted in 2019 with a quicker initial get-off, closing speed or even production, but few possess Ferrell's combination of size, burst, strength, instincts and technique. He culminated a storybook career at Clemson by helping the Tigers win their second national championship in three seasons, registering 55 tackles and setting career-highs in tackles for loss (20), sacks (11.5) and forced fumbles (three).

The fact that Clemson boasted so much talent along its defensive line makes it difficult to grade each prospect individually as opponents cannot simply assign double-teams the way they might against other, mere mortal groups. The traits Ferrell possesses, however, are easy to identify and project to the next level, especially given that his production has come at right defensive end (against left tackles) and regardless of whether he started the play out of a two- or three-point stance.

**STRENGTHS:** Built like he was cut from a mold for an NFL defensive end. Shows good initial quickness and the ability to time the snap on a speed rush. Good balance and flexibility to dip under the reach of would-be pass blockers and incorporates his hands into the rush, slapping away at tackles' reach and showing an effective up-under rip move to complement his speed. Generates impressive power as a bull rusher, pushing opponents onto their heels with his arms locked out and showing very good leg drive.

Coordinated athlete when stalking the ball-carrier, showing enough speed and agility to flush and finish — the 2017 tape shows him chasing down Louisville's Lamar Jackson. Shows good awareness of passing lanes and backs slipping behind him, selling out with his leaps and, at times, twirling in the air in an effort to bat passes away. Steady development in his awareness of the ball, registering all five of his forced fumbles over the past two seasons, including three in 2018.

Very effective in the running game. Understands his containment responsibility and does not rush upfield blindly. Very effective use of his long arms and strong hands, showing impressive technique to attack half the blocker, including when splitting double-teams. Intriguing physical upside, especially given that won't turn 22 until a week after the draft.

**WEAKNESSES:** May be a better football player than athlete, lacking the elite quick-twitch burst to consistently win with his speed rush. Shows normal but not extraordinary acceleration to close or when pursuing from the backside and might not wow with his 40-yard dash, raising questions about his potential fit as a stand-up linebacker who would be asked to drop into coverage more than just occasionally. Does not always pursue downfield with the reckless abandon coaches would prefer.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Chandler Jones, Arizona Cardinals — Like the 6-5, 265-pound Jones, Ferrell combines length, power and burst to beat would-be

PHOTO BY KIRTHMON F. DOZIER/DETROIT FREE PRESS VIA USA TODAY SPORTS

blockers in a variety of ways. Both are powerful enough to handle traditional defensive end duties while also possessing the agility to rush off the edge out of a two-point stance.

**Grade: 8.2**

### 3. RASHAN GARY, Michigan*

6-4, 283 40 time: 4.67 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Gary sure does look the part of a top 10 pick — just ask him — but it is worth noting that he only registered a combined 9.5 sacks in three seasons at Michigan. To be fair, he made many more plays than his statistics suggest, constantly fighting through double- and even triple-teams and forcing ball-carriers into the waiting arms of fortunate teammates.

At minimum, Gary should be a long-time starter with intriguing positional and schematic versatility with the upside to develop into a true difference-maker that NFL opponents will have to game plan against on a weekly basis.

**STRENGTHS:** Already possesses an NFL-caliber frame with impressive overall weight distribution and grown-man strength. Varies his burst off the snap, showing impressive initial quickness and lateral agility for a man of his size when he wants it. Best attribute may be Gary's upper-body length and strength as he simply rag-dolls opponents at times, personifying the coaching expression of "stack and shed" with dynamite sticks for hands.

Show blue-collar toughness in the running game. Possesses the strength and size to slide inside on passing downs, giving creative defensive coordinators quite the weapon to create advantageous matchups. Looks comfortable rushing out of the two-point stance and even dropping into coverage. Terrific closing speed, which translates into explosive collisions. Does not rely upon hits, however, showing strength, technique and competitiveness to run through ballcarriers for clean, reliable tackles.

**WEAKNESSES:** Can be a tick late off the snap when he guesses wrong. Lacks the elite explosiveness to beat top tackles with a speed rush when he gets a late start. Too often appears willing to read-and-react to the action, rather than pinning his ears back and exploding upfield. Shoulder injury that sidelined him for multiple games in 2018 requires a closer look by NFL doctors. Needs to show greater awareness of passing lanes, failing to tip a single pass in three seasons at Michigan.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Everson Griffen, Minnesota Vikings — Griffen signed with USC as a highly touted prep but flashed rather than dominated at the college level, earning him the 100th overall pick in 2011 despite freakish athletic gifts. He's been voted to three Pro Bowls since — recording 66.5 sacks in nine NFL seasons.

**Grade: 8.0**

### 4. MONTEZ SWEAT, Mississippi State

6-6, 252 40 time: 4.65 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Even in a draft class like this, perhaps no defensive lineman offers a more exciting blend of physical traits than Sweat, likely assuring him immediate success as an edge rusher in the NFL.

He's taken a circuitous route after being a highly touted prep tight end out of Georgia, surprising some by signing with Michigan State, getting into the doghouse, transferring to junior college and then landing at Mississippi State on the same line with Jeffery Simmons.

Sweat twice earned first-team All-SEC honors, setting personal bests in tackles (53) and sacks (12) in 2018, to go with 14.5 tackles for loss. At the Senior Bowl, Sweat's intoxicating blend of speed, length and power made him arguably the top prospect there. He does come with red flags, but if he commits himself to his craft, he could develop into one of the league's most feared edge rushers.

**STRENGTHS:** Boasts an ideal frame for an edge rusher with a rare height, length (35 5/8-inch arms) and a tapered middle with good overall musculature. Twitchy off the snap, showing impressive initial burst and able to tightly scrape the corner without sacrificing speed. Experienced rushing from two- and three-point stances, showing the quickness to beat tackles with a simple speed rush out of either.

Understands how to use his long arms to keep would-be blockers off of him, extending with a powerful initial punch that can knock opponents onto their heels. Strong and competitive enough to latch onto ballcarriers attempting to run by him while he's being blocked, slipping free and dragging down runners. Good effort in pursuit, showing vision and agility to avoid traffic laterally and downfield. Still technically raw in some areas, but that can be taught, suggesting that he has still has a lot of runway left on his learning curve.

**WEAKNESSES:** Far too reliant on his natural tools to beat opponents, needing to show more of a plan of attack as a pass rusher and learning to sync his upper and lower body. Converts speed to power off the edge but needs to show greater strength in his hands to rip free of blocks once opponents have latched on. Disappointing awareness of passing lanes. Details of his transfer from Michigan State require vetting.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Aldon Smith, Oakland Raiders — Prior to off-field issues ruining his promising NFL career, Smith earned the seventh overall pick of the 2011 draft (San Francisco) and proved to be an instant difference-maker, recording 14 sacks as a rookie and 19.5 in his second NFL season. Sweat has this kind of potential, dominating opponents at times with his prototypical blend of length, speed and power.

**Grade: 7.9**

### 5. ZACH ALLEN, Boston College

6-5, 280 40 time: 4.85 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** With pass-rusher extraordinaire Harold Landry drawing plenty of attention on the other side, Allen emerged as one of the breakout stars in college football as a junior in 2017, making 100 tackles, including 15.5 for loss and four sacks. With Landry moving on to the Tennessee Titans via the second round of the 2018 draft, opponents shifted their focus to Allen ... and he was still productive, with 15 tackles for loss and 6.5 sacks.

Among this defensive line class, Allen ranks among those with the highest floor due to his size, strength and lunch pail-like effort. He lacks the athletic ceiling of others, however — something that was reinforced when he faced top tackles at the Senior Bowl. Allen is the type of "safe" player clubs love to find in the second round, as he perhaps lacks the special traits to warrant a top 32 pick.

**STRENGTHS:** Broad shouldered, country-strong

## SPOTLIGHT

## Zach Allen, Boston College

*You had a spectacular career at Boston College, why did you decide to play at the Senior Bowl?* The opportunity to meet all of the NFL coaches, of course, is important but so too is the chance to play multiple positions against the best competition. You could ask anyone here why they wanted to come and it's because we all want to play against the best.

*What scheme and position do you feel most comfortable?* At my school, we were multiple. We did 4-3, we did 3-4. Our base was 4-3 but, honestly, I've heard a lot of discussions, 'Is he a 4-3 or is he a 3-4 guy?' I take that as a compliment because it's because I can do so much. I feel like I'd be successful in both of those schemes.

*What is the best piece of advice that you've received from your coaches at Boston College, those at the Senior Bowl or any of the players about the pre-draft process?* I've spoken to Harold Landry a lot because he just went through it and he said to surround yourself with competitive people who are going to push you. Whether it be training or what have you, find guys who are like-minded and are going for the same thing, so they're going to push you. It has been great. ... When you're with the best, you're all going to do whatever you can to prove that you're the top dog.

*What are some career highlights that will always stick out for you?* I think for us it was winning the Miami game — the red bandana game for us — this year. And the previous year against FSU for what that tradition means to us and what a great honor it is to represent such a great person in Welles Crowther (a volunteer firefighter who died saving lives during the 9/11 attacks). Being able to win both these years in his memory against two very storied programs was huge.

*The tape shows what teams are getting with you on the field but what are they getting off the field?* Off the field, you aren't going to have to worry about me. I think that's huge. It is a big investment when you bring a guy into a building, especially if they are a higher-round pick. You're not going to have any run-ins with the law or anything like that. I'm going to be the first one in the building and the last one out. Football really is my world.

PHOTO BY FRED KFOURY III/ICON SPORTSWIRE (ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA AP IMAGES)

PHOTO BY MARIO HOUBEN/CSM VIA ZUMA WIRE (CAL SPORT MEDIA VIA AP IMAGES)

frame with good overall weight distribution including a thick lower half. Good initial quickness for a big man and times the snap well. Accelerates smoothly upfield and is able to slap away the hands of would-be blockers, while dipping under to cross their face and win the edge or countering back inside. Lateral agility and balance to shuffle to string plays out wide and keep contain.

Possesses the size and strength to handle two-gap responsibilities when he keeps his pads low. Played all over the line in college. Reads the eyes of the quarterback and attempts to disrupt passing lanes, leaping into the air to and showing good hand-eye coordination to bat down the ball, breaking up a DB-like 14 passes over his career, including a career-high seven in 2018 along with two blocked kicks. Blue collar player who gives you everything he has on every snap.

**WEAKNESSES:** While athletic for his size, Allen lacks the quick-twitch to be a consistent outside pass rush threat against NFL tackles. This includes when he lines up as a stand-up rusher, showing less initial burst out of the two-point than he has with his hand in the dirt. Stiff in his midsection, needing to throttle down to re-direct his charge and needing a wide arc to scrape the corner.

**Grade: 7.6**

## 6. JAYLON FERGUSON, Louisiana Tech

6-5, 256 40 time: 4.70 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** With 45 career sacks, scouts eagerly anticipated seeing Ferguson against top competition at the Senior Bowl. Though he did register a sack during the game, Ferguson failed to distinguish himself during the week of practice, likely pushing him outside of the top 50 picks despite his undeniable production. At that point, Ferguson's length, quickness and experience could make him a steal.

**STRENGTHS:** Twitchy, long-limbed pass rusher capable of beating tackles off the ball with just his burst. Good upper- and lower body coordination to slap away the reach of opponents while ducking or dipping away, leaving a small target for would-be blockers. Balanced, coordinated athlete with the lateral agility to elude flat-footed blockers. Good leg drive for the bull rush.

Appears equally quick off the ball regardless of whether he's rushing out of a stand-up or three-point stance. Flashes strength in his hands to rip away would-be blockers. Has long, 34-inch arms to lasso ball-carriers, showing good hand-eye coordination to trip up runners as well as to knock the ball free, forcing seven fumbles over his career.

**WEAKNESSES:** Plays a finesse brand of football that did not translate well at the Senior Bowl, where Ferguson struggled to break free once the top tackles latched onto him. Too willing to pin his ears back to rush the quarterback, failing to keep contain versus the run. Doesn't recognize traps or cut blocks coming his way. Too easily negated by misdirection and play-action.

**Grade: 7.5**

## 7. OSHANE XIMINES, Old Dominion

6-4, 245 40 time: 4.70 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Ximines' game is built on speed, which he used to dominate Conference USA to the tune of 12 sacks, 18.5 tackles for loss and four forced fumbles in 2018. While Ximines performed well in early contests against top competition (including a seven-tackle, two-sack performance in Old Dominion's stunning upset over Virginia Tech), he was mostly held in check at the Senior Bowl after measuring in 10 pounds lighter (245) than he was listed for the Monarchs, suggesting that his initial role in the NFL will be that of a third-down pass-rush specialist.

**STRENGTHS:** Smooth accelerator off the snap, flashing an explosive burst to cross the face of tackles. Possesses the core flexibility to run the arc efficiently, wrapping tightly around the corner without losing speed. Stronger than he looks, generating an effective bull rush due to his length, pad level and good leg drive. Good coordination between his upper and lower body to effectively swim past flat-footed tackles.

Shows good awareness of quick throws, getting his hands to deflect passes and even tipping an interception to himself against Marshall. Terrific hand-eye coordination to get his hands on the ball often, forcing an eye-popping 11 fumbles over his career and deflecting 12 passes, as well as one kick. Wasn't often asked to drop back into coverage at Old Dominion but shows intriguing agility (including quick reactions to cut-blocks), which suggests he may be able to handle those duties.

**WEAKNESSES:** Starred as a hand-in-the-dirt edge rusher for Old Dominion but lacks the sand in his pants to remain in this role full time in the NFL. Too easily rooted out in the running game and struggled to break free once tackles (or even tight ends) latched onto him in pass protection. Didn't show the same burst upfield when rushing out of the two-point stance.

**Grade: 7.3**

## 8. JOE JACKSON, Miami*

6-5, 265 40 time: 4.83 2nd-3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The 2018 season was a disappointing one for Miami fans but don't blame Jackson, who led the team in sacks, marking the third consecutive year in which he topped the Hurricanes in either sacks, tackles for loss, total stops (among defensive linemen) or all three. While lacking the national name recognition of some of the other top-rated defensive ends in this remarkable class, Jackson is well respected by scouts, likely earning a top 64 selection and projecting as a future starter.

**STRENGTHS:** Sports an imposing frame with broad shoulders, long arms and above average height for the position. Loose-hipped, which helps make him faster around the edge than others who may run better for the stopwatch. Terrific effort in pursuit, chasing ball-carriers to the sideline and often yards downfield. Good lateral agility and vision to avoid getting caught up in the trash while in pursuit, taking aggressive (but not reckless) angles and adjusting as needed.

Uses his praying mantis-like arms to snatch ball-carriers seemingly out of his grasp, demonstrating impressive strength to drag them to the ground. Physical tackler, twisting ball-carriers to the ground and often arriving with an explosive thud. Competitive and alert. Shows some savvy with the ball in his hands, scoring touchdowns in 2018 (42-yard interception return) and 2016 (18-yard scoop and score off a fumble).

**WEAKNESSES:** More quick than fast, with some wasted motion off the snap, appearing as if he's running in place when he doesn't time the count correctly. Just average straight-line speed to chase down ball-carriers despite giving good effort. Good strength but negates it at times by playing too high. Limited experience rushing from the left side (versus the right tackle) or out of a two-point stance. Wore a brace over his left elbow in 2018, which will require a closer look by NFL doctors at the combine.

**Grade: 7.2**

## 9. ANTHONY NELSON, Iowa

6-7, 272 40 time: 4.70 2nd-3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Size, strength and speed are obviously critical; Nelson earns solid grades for each. But he's a better football player than athlete, winning not only because of his physical traits but his awareness and ability to quickly disengage from blockers. Nelson won't be one of the first defensive linemen drafted, but don't be surprised if he winds up enjoying a longer, more productive NFL career than some of the flashier athletes selected ahead of him.

**STRENGTHS:** Country-strong frame with rare height for the position, making Nelson not only imposing but well-suited to breaking free from would-be blockers.

Technically sound push-pull and over-arm swim moves to complement surprising lateral agility and flexibility. More sudden than his frame would suggest off the snap, showing deceptive initial quickness to cross the face of tackles as a speed rusher. Good lateral quickness and balance through contact to re-direct on counters back inside and shows very good leg drive on the bull rush to walk opponents deep into the pocket.

Good awareness of what is happening around him, peeling off from blockers quickly to pursue passes into the flat or disrupt screens. Showed steady improvement at Iowa and did not look out of place at the Senior Bowl.

**WEAKNESSES:** Nelson is more smooth than explosive as an upfield rusher and is not likely to wow in workouts. He shows good effort in pursuit but lacks the speed to catch ball-carriers from behind. Like a lot of taller players, he shows some stiffness in his hips when changing direction and struggles with pad level as he tires. Some will view him as a bit of a 'tweener as Nelson is not overwhelmingly powerful at the point of attack as a two-gap tackle, nor does he possess the quick-twitch of a traditional 4-3 defensive end. Where does he fit best in the NFL?

**Grade: 7.2**

## 10. AUSTIN BRYANT, Clemson

6-4, 265 40 time: 4.78 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Bryant was asked to play a variety of roles for Clemson, alternately lining up with his hand in the dirt as a traditional defensive end, rushing upfield out of a stand-up stance and dropping into space in coverage. He possesses impressive initial quickness and agility for a man of his size and should only improve with greater strength and repetitions, offering the kind of upside to warrant Day 2 consideration.

Perhaps the greatest statement about just how much talent has been playing along the defensive line for Clemson is the fact that the prototypically-built Bryant — and his 35 career tackles for loss, 20 sacks and penchant for making big plays in big moments — is expected to be selected fourth among the Tigers' fearsome front.

**STRENGTHS:** Looks the part of an NFL edge rusher. Flashes excellent initial quickness, timing his get-off with the ball to cross the face of right tackles and showing the quickness to counter back inside. Offers a great deal of schematic versatility. A flexible athlete with the agility, bend and closing speed to be effective on twists and stunts. Accelerates quickly, generating impressive power as a tackler, creating some big collisions. Shows some awareness of passing lanes, getting his hands up and showing good timing on his leaps to hamper the view of quarterbacks. Possesses obvious athletic ability and appears to be just scratching the surface of his potential.

**WEAKNESSES:** Currently lacks ideal strength at the point of attack. Too often stands up as he engages the blocker, losing the leverage battle (as well as sight of the ball) and struggling to disengage. Lack of playing time is evident in how long it takes him to process the action, too often hesitating and reacting only after the ball is moving. Does not anticipate cuts or trap blocks well and spends more time than he should on the ground. Does not show a wide variety of pass rush moves and hand technique, relying mostly on pure speed, a counter inside, a bull rush and the variety of twists and stunts utilized by the Clemson coaching staff. Has undergone surgery on both feet for the same injury (broken fifth metatarsal), which may warrant further investigation from doctors.

**Grade: 7.2**

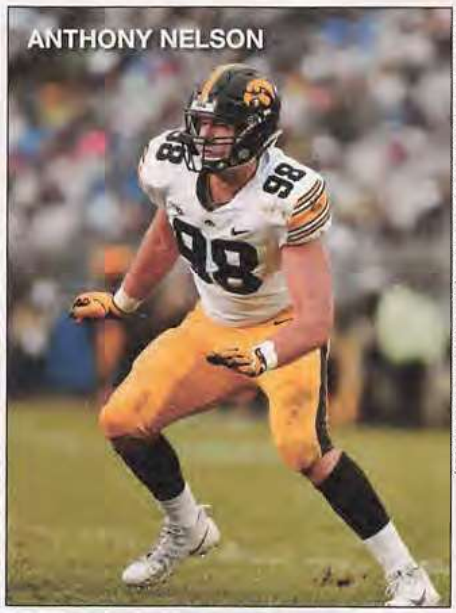


PHOTO BY RANDY LITZINGER/ICON SPORTSWIRE (ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA AP IMAGES)

## 11. CHASE WINOVICH, Michigan

6-3, 255 40 time: 4.82 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Despite some clear limitations, Winovich was able to bully Big Ten tackles with his length, strength, technique and hustle. Whether rushing upfield out of a two- or three-point stance, Winovich is at his best on the attack, projecting as an immediate sparkplug and longtime NFL contributor.

**STRENGTHS:** While lacking preferred height for an edge rusher, Winovich possesses a stout, compact frame with good overall weight distribution and long arms. A master at guessing the snap count, Winovich makes plays off the edge and excels on counter-moves, incorporating a carpenter's tool belt full of techniques to dip, rip and slip by opponents. He is an effective bull rusher, as well, showing impressive functional power and pad level to get underneath and drive back much larger opponents. Holds up much better in run support than his size would suggest.

Winovich's best attribute is his hands, which are spinning cinder blocks that help him quickly chop through the efforts of tackles to latch onto him. Winovich adjusts his angles in pursuit with a high-revving, almost maniacal style sure to win over coaches. Routinely chases plays from the backside, often 10-plus yards downfield.

**WEAKNESSES:** Stiff-hipped and high cut, causing him to struggle (relatively speaking) when changing direction. Forced to run a wide arc due to his core stiffness, limiting his effectiveness on twists and stunts and really laboring to peel off and pursue if the quarterback is able to toss the ball over him into the flat or when he guesses wrong on a pitch his way (see, Wisconsin). Wasn't asked to cover much at Michigan and does not appear to be fluid enough to handle this role at the next level. Possesses a country-strong but far from sculpted frame.

**Grade: 7.1**

## 12. CHARLES OMENIHU, Texas

6-6, 274 40 time: 4.80 3rd-4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Teams willing to roll the dice on athletic upside could be handsomely rewarded with Omenihu, who boasts as exciting of an NFL starter kit as any prospect invited to this year's Senior Bowl. The issue for scouts is why did it take the supremely gifted Omenihu until his senior season to become such a standout. He posted 18 tackles for loss, including 9.5 sacks, in 2018.

**STRENGTHS:** Boasts a prototypical blend of height, arm length (36 1/8 inches) and twitchy athleticism to leave scouts drooling. Accelerates smoothly, turning quick power steps into longer strides and showing very good top-end speed for his size. Vastly improved use of hands in 2018, showing greater strength and hand placement. Surprisingly balanced when dropping back into zone coverage, showing awareness of receivers around him. Reliable tackler, swallowing ball-carriers with his length and showing both power and a touch of nastiness in his play to slam them to the ground.

**WEAKNESSES:** One-year wonder who feasted on a lot of one-on-one blocks in 2018. Moved all over the field in 2018 to create advantageous matchups, including inside to defensive tackle where his initial quickness and length made him a difficult draw for college guards. High-cut player who struggles with pad level as he tires, negating his own strength. Long legs leave him a bit vulnerable to cut-blocks.

**Grade: 7.0**

## 13. JALEN JELKS, Oregon

6-6, 250 40 time: 4.70 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Perhaps anticipating that he'd be asked to move to linebacker in the NFL, Jelks switched positions in 2018 opting to play linebacker as a senior after enjoying a breakout junior campaign in which he set career-highs with 59 tackles, 15.5 tackles for loss and seven sacks. He saw action at linebacker and defensive end at the Senior Bowl, flashing disruptive potential but falling short of regenerating the momentum he'd created a year earlier.

**STRENGTHS:** Looks like a stunt double for the 1981 film "Condorman" with an imposing 82 5/8-inch wingspan and athletic, V-shaped frame. Shows good initial quickness as a speed rusher, exhibiting both burst and timing. Stronger at the point of attack than he looks, keeping his butt down to maintain leverage and showing at least functional upper-body strength for playing at the line of scrimmage. Showed awareness, timing in his leaps and good hand-eye coordination to disrupt passing lanes while playing along the defensive line as a junior in 2017, generating seven of his 11 career passes defended. Active, powerful hands to break the wrists of would-be blockers, ripping himself free on his way to the ball.

**WEAKNESSES:** Appears to lack the frame to add much extra weight, already boasting a rocked-up upper body but possessing relatively narrow hips and corn stalks for legs. Too easily moved off the line of scrimmage, especially when his pad level rises. Doesn't appear to have a consistent plan as a pass rusher, too often simply rushing blindly upfield. Just average straight-line speed upfield, as well as in pursuit.

**Grade: 6.8**

## 14. JORDAN BRAILFORD, Oklahoma St.*

6-3, 250 40 time: 4.74 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** It is hard to fault Brailford for opting to declare early for the 2019 draft, given his breakout 2018 campaign and the fact he missed two years (2014 redshirting and 2016 due to medical hardship), but he is more of a middle- to late-round prospect rather than the early pick his splashy statistics suggest. In terms of size and athleticism, Brailford looks the part of an NFL linebacker (or third-down pass-rush specialist), but he'll need to develop greater awareness and technique to handle a full-time role, making him a bit

of a project, though one who should be able to find a niche on special teams as he learns.

**STRENGTHS:** Good-looking athlete. Possesses the quick-twitch explosiveness to beat tackles off the ball with his speed rush. Light on his feet, showing the balance and coordination to change directions easily and accelerate quickly. Plays with a see-the-ball, get-the-ball mentality, showing intriguing aggression and closing speed when he has a direct line, including when racing through gaps as an off-ball linebacker. Converts speed to power as a hitter, generating explosiveness as a hitter with three forced fumbles the past two seasons.

**WEAKNESSES:** A classic 'tweener, lacking the frame to handle full-time duties along the defensive line and showing below average instincts for linebacker. Takes questionable angles to the ball, leaving cutback lanes or taking the bait and blindly rushing upfield against screens, draws and other misdirection. Brailford shows just average knee bend and flexibility in scraping the corner. Use of hands to defeat blocks is almost nonexistent. When blockers get their hands on him, it is usually game over.

**Grade: 6.4**

### 15. CARL GRANDERSON, Wyoming

6-5, 246 40 time: 4.70 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Granderson dominated the Mountain West in 2017, recording 77 tackles and leading the conference with 16 tackles for loss while posting a team-high 9.5 sacks less than a year removed from tearing his ACL. With opponents focusing their blocking schemes on him in 2018, however, his production dropped significantly (40-7.5-3) and his work at the Senior Bowl was a mixed bag.

Granderson's quickness and length will appeal to teams looking for pass-rushing specialist and don't rule out a conversion to a more traditional linebacker role.

**STRENGTHS:** Legitimate NFL-caliber athleticism is apparent, as Granderson did not physically look out of place among the top prospects at the Senior Bowl. Possesses the quick-twitch to challenge tackles as a speed rusher and is even quicker on his counters back to the inside, showing the suddenness in changing directions on his way to the quarterback or to a receiver at the stem of his routes. Often asked to drop into coverage, showing intriguing balance in his backpedal, as well as the loose hips and quick feet to turn and run.

**WEAKNESSES:** Starred as a 4-3 defensive end but lacks the bulk to handle this role for most teams in the NFL and may not have the frame to add much weight. While possessing broad shoulders, Granderson has relatively narrow hips, requiring that most of any additional weight be packed onto his limbs, potentially taking away from his mobility. Too reliant upon his upfield speed and lateral agility to elude blockers, struggling to disengage efficiently once they've locked on. Limited to just six games in 2016 after tearing his ACL, resulting in season-ending surgery.

**Grade: 6.3**

### 16. JOHN COMINSKY, Charleston

6-5, 286 40 time: 4.80 5th-6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** It is easy to understand why Cominsky fell through the cracks on the recruiting trail as he signed with the Golden Eagles as a 218-pound option quarterback before building himself into a rock-solid 286-pound monster in the weight room. One has to dominate at the Division II level to earn an invitation to the prestigious Senior Bowl and NFL Scouting Combine, and that is precisely what Cominsky did, racking up 140 tackles, including 39.5 tackles for loss and 9.5 sacks over the past two seasons.

He is the first player from Charleston to ever be invited to the Combine and would be the first player ever drafted into the NFL from this program, as well, projecting best as a two-gapping defensive end for an odd front.

**STRENGTHS:** Self-made player who has grown into a legitimate NFL prospect. Imposing, broad-shouldered frame with excellent overall weight distribution and no extra flab. Stout run defender with the upper-body strength and length to handle containment responsibilities. Shows good lateral agility and balance through contact to string runs out wide. Keeps his eyes glued to the ball, peeling off blocks to pursue downfield. Position-versatile, seeing action inside at defensive tackle and defensive end at the Senior Bowl. Big-time motor.

**WEAKNESSES:** Dominated at the lower level but struggled to make an impact against top competition at the Senior Bowl. Lacks the burst and bend to provide much as a pass rusher. Just average initial quickness and lateral agility to elude, struggling to get past pass blockers, even in one-on-one drills in which the defenders have an inherent advantage. Poor pad level for an interior defender, getting rooted out too easily in the running game.

**Grade: 6.0**

### 17. JONATHAN LEDBETTER, Georgia

6-4, 271 40 time: 4.75 5th-6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Ledbetter is a compact, powerful base end whose ability to slide up and down the line of scrimmage could draw interest from 3-4 and 4-3 proponents. He is more agile than explosive when it comes to rushing the passer, winning as much with technique and tenacity as raw talent. While perhaps not ranking among the "special" athletes in this year's terrific defensive line class, Ledbetter is reliable, projecting as part of a rotation at the next level, albeit not necessarily as a starter.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses a power-packed frame with broad shoulders and good upper-body development. Has active, heavy hands and shows an advanced repertoire of pass rush moves to wrench himself free from even iron-gripped blockers. Better bend around the edge than his frame would suggest, wrapping the corner tightly when left unblocked and showing enough effort and speed in pursuit to harass from behind. Offers some intriguing potential for twists and stunts because of his agility and power.

**WEAKNESSES:** A bit of a 'tweener, lacking the stout frame to hold up consistently as an interior defensive lineman as well as the quick-twitch burst to challenge the outside as a speed rusher, registering just 4.5 sacks in 32 games. Looks close to being physically maxed out, already possessing thick limbs and good overall weight distribution.

**Grade: 5.9**

### 18. L.J. COLLIER, TCU

6-2, 280 40 time: 4.80 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Collier flourished after making the switch from defensive tackle to defensive end in 2018, topping his combined numbers from the previous two seasons in a breakout campaign that earned him first-team All-Big 12 honors from conference coaches and an invitation to the Senior Bowl. An impressive performance in Mobile had Collier's stock rising further as he showed an intriguing blend of power and agility, projecting as a jack-of-all trades type along the line of scrimmage.

**STRENGTHS:** Compact, powerful frame for the position. Active, powerful hands. Shows good upper-body strength to lock out and hold his ground in the running game. More slippery and coordinated than his stout frame suggests, spinning off would-be blockers and flashing an intriguing explosive closing burst when he needs it. Good strength for the drag-down tackle. Versatile defender experienced playing multiple roles, including as an interior defensive lineman, traditional defensive end and stand-up rusher off both edges.

**WEAKNESSES:** Short stubby frame. Just average initial burst off the snap for an edge rusher. Often ranks among the last off the ball, which is disconcerting given that Collier flashes an explosive burst when he wants to use it, raising questions about his awareness and focus. Too often he looks like he's walking through cement, showing just average speed and effort in pursuit outside of the tackle box.

**Grade: 5.6**

## 3 TO WATCH

### SLEEPER

**Anthony Nelson, Iowa**
Overshadowed by the twitchier athletes in this class, Nelson quietly held up well at the Senior Bowl, showing off the length, strength and technique that helped him boost his tackles, tackles for loss and sack numbers in each of the past three seasons.

### COULD DISAPPOINT

**Jaylon Ferguson, Louisiana Tech**
Ferguson's record is impressive but a disappointing week against top talent at the Senior Bowl has some wondering if his numbers were padded by weak competition.

### SMALL SCHOOL STUD

**Oshane Ximines, Old Dominion**
Ximines may need to move to a stand-up OLB role in the NFL, but he is lightning-quick off the edge — just ask Virginia Tech, which suffered an upset at the hands of Ximines and the Monarchs last season.

## WORTH WATCHING

**Shareef Miller, Penn State (6-5, 260)***
The flamboyant Miller doesn't lack confidence, especially in his quick first step off the snap.

**Cece Jefferson, Florida (6-1, 252)**
Made 34.5 career tackles for loss, lining up on the edge as DE and OLB.

**Maxx Crosby, Eastern Michigan (6-4, 247)***
Declared early after racking up 35 tackles for loss, 18.5 sacks in past two seasons.

**Landis Durham, Texas A&M (6-3, 255)**
Slimmed down a bit last season and could fit as OLB in a 3-4 system.

**Corbin Kaufusi, Brigham Young (6-8, 275)**
Imposing, athletic; flashes straight-line speed; comes from good football bloodlines.

*For further analysis of the 2019 defensive ends, visit www.nfldraftscout.com.*

# Defensive Tackles

**OVERVIEW** Given their incredible size and power, perhaps it is appropriate that defensive tackles are the strongest position in the 2019 draft, offering rare top-end talent, plenty of middle-round value and intriguing late-round projects.

Entering the 2018 season, Houston's Ed Oliver was the big name, but then an even bigger star emerged in Tuscaloosa, where Alabama's Quinnen Williams became the best player in college football, flashing the combination of raw power, athleticism and still-untapped potential that could make him the No. 1 overall pick.

If pure size is what NFL clubs are looking for, this position group has loads of options, including massive Clemson run-stuffer Dexter Lawrence and Notre Dame's Jerry Tillery, whose height and wingspan might just make him the most imposing player in the draft. Teams needing a run-stuffing force could find bargains on Day 3 with Florida State's Demarcus Christmas, Washington's Greg Gaines or Texas A&M's Daylon Mack.

Perhaps the most fun element of this year's defensive tackle class is the number of legitimate sleeper candidates. Teams willing to roll the dice on gifted prospects who perhaps need a little fine-tuning could be handsomely rewarded with a gamble on UCF's Trysten Hill, Western Illinois' Khalen Saunders or even former top recruit Byron Cowart.

**2019 CLASS GRADE**
**A**

PHOTO BY MATTHEW EMMONS-USA TODAY SPORTS

*Denotes underclassman

### 1. QUINNEN WILLIAMS, Alabama*

6-3, 295 40 time: 4.95 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** With all due respect to quarterbacks Tua Tagovailoa and Heisman Trophy winner Kyler Murray (among others), Williams was the best player in college football in 2018.

It is easy to venture into hyperbole when describing Williams' staggering rise from a member of Alabama's defensive line rotation to the Outland Trophy winner as the top interior lineman in football ... to maybe even the top pick in the 2019 NFL Draft.

He finished the 2018 season with 71 tackles, including 19.5 for loss and eight sacks, earning unanimous All-America honors within days of turning 21 years old, suggesting that the best is yet to come.

Teams will have to weigh the fact that he enjoyed just one dominant season before making the jump to the NFL, but Williams' combination of size, quickness and power suggest he is on his way toward future Pro Bowls rather than being a fluke.

**STRENGTHS:** Prototypical build for an interior defensive lineman. Blessed with an exceptional combination of raw power and shocking quickness, alternately beating opponents with strength and speed. Often the first defender off the ball, surprising would-be blockers with his quick-twitch explosiveness, showing the ability to fire through gaps to penetrate and ruin plays from the start.

Terrific upper-body strength and length at the point of attack, utilizing a powerful push-pull technique to quickly rip through would-be blockers. Terrific core strength, leg drive and use of leverage to drive would-be blockers into the backfield on simple bull rushes and when anchoring against double-teams.

Surprising balance and agility for such a large man, deftly maneuvering through traffic to stalk ball-carriers and showing impressive speed and effort in pursuit. Intimidating tackler, swallowing ball-carriers with his wingspan and power, tossing them to the turf in dramatic fashion. Appears to be just scratching the surface of his potential.

**WEAKNESSES:** Still just a little raw; lacks ideal awareness of trap and cut blocks coming his way, with some knockdown blocks on tape (Georgia, Texas A&M). Successfully negated by Oklahoma's quick-tempo passing attack. Needs to show greater awareness of passing lanes; deflected just one pass in two seasons with the Tide. Powerful tackler but could do a better job of using his length and power to rip at the ball, forcing zero fumbles despite a track record of big collisions.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Fletcher Cox, Philadelphia Eagles — While listed at 6-4, 310 pounds, Cox looks and plays even bigger, dominating competition at times with his exceptional strength and underrated quickness. Like Cox — who played his college ball at Mississippi State — Williams has the look of a longtime difference-maker and has proven his ability against elite competition.

**Grade: 8.4**

### FLASHBACK

**It takes at least three years to determine the success or failure of draft picks**

*Here's a snapshot of recent hits and misses*

**Diamond in the Rough**

**Javon Hargrave, Steelers (Third round, 2016)**
The former South Carolina State star has more than answered doubts about his level of competition, starting all but one game in the past three seasons at nose guard and exploding for 6.5 sacks in 2018.

**Swing and Miss**

**Malik McDowell, Seahawks (Second round, 2017)**
McDowell was one big walking red flag when the Seahawks opted to invest the 35th overall selection in him two years ago. He never played a snap in the NFL after suffering injuries in an ATV accident prior to the start of his rookie season.

**Breakout Player**

**Jarran Reed, Seahawks (Second round, 2016)**
Fortunately for Seattle, Reed is among those who have picked up the slack left behind by McDowell. Characterized as just a run-stuffer when he was drafted out of Alabama three years ago, Reed rose up for 10.5 sacks in 2018.

### 2. ED OLIVER, Houston*

6-3, 285 40 time: 4.80 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The Houston native could have played anywhere, but he stayed in his hometown and piled up major awards, as well a staggering 53 tackles for loss in three seasons. As a true sophomore, Oliver was named the Outland Trophy winner as the nation's best lineman.

It may sound counter-intuitive, but the toughest draw for the big guys blocking inside is often a smaller guy, especially those with Oliver's exceptional quickness and agility. He's much better suited to playing the penetrating three-technique or even defensive end in a standard 4-3 alignment (or switching to linebacker if drafted by a predominately 3-4 club). Either way, Oliver

## PROTOTYPE

### ✔ Pass Rush

**Ed Oliver, Houston**
Forget that Oliver registered "just" 13.5 career sacks at Houston as he was asked to take up blocks as an ill-fitting nose guard. Focus, instead, on his quickness and agility that helped him register an eye-popping 53 tackles for loss in just three seasons.

### ✔ Run Defense

**Dexter Lawrence, Clemson**
A natural two-gap run-stuffer whose incredible bulk and athleticism has drawn comparisons to freakish nose guards like Haloti Ngata and Albert Haynesworth. Lawrence can almost single-handedly shut down opposing rushing attacks.

### ✔ Explosion

**Trysten Hill, Central Florida**
In terms of initial quickness and the power he generates from his bowling ball-like build, few exhibit more natural explosive qualities to his game than Hill.

### ✔ Strength

**Greg Gaines, Washington**
Although he has relatively short arms, Gaines sets anchor and is virtually unmovable in the middle due to his leg drive and upper-body strength.

### ✔ Tacking

**Quinnen Williams, Alabama**
An exceptional talent who justifiably could have been named for multiple categories, Williams shows remarkable change of direction for a big man as well as impressive instincts to hunt ball-carriers.

### ✔ Intangibles

**Christian Wilkins, Clemson**
While perhaps more of a prankster than some would prefer, Wilkins, a four-year starter, was revered for his leadership and selflessness at Clemson, playing a key role in convincing NFL-eligible teammates to return to the Tigers to make a successful title run in 2018.

is one of the headliners of the most dominant defensive line class in the past 20 years.

**STRENGTHS:** A truly exceptional athlete for the position, exhibiting light feet and loose hips, which could result in spectacular workout numbers and perhaps fan the flames of those suggesting a position switch is coming in the NFL. Explodes off the snap like he is fired from a cannon, slicing through gaps, including those of would-be double-team blocks. Easy bend to get skinny, showing the core flexibility to slither his way around opponents and quickly re-direct left or right to pursue the ball-carrier.

Much stronger than his frame suggests, showing a powerful initial pop for the bull rush as well as good pad level and leg drive to get under much larger blockers and drive them backward. Terrific awareness of the ball around him, working to free himself from blocks to pursue with passion laterally and often 10-plus yards downfield; recorded 11 passes defensed over his career, including six as a freshman.

**WEAKNESSES:** Lacks the size teams want on the interior of the defensive line and already owns a muscle-packed frame, suggesting that he may not have much room for additional weight without compromising his trademark quickness and agility. Too reliant on his feet to put him in position to make plays; needs to show greater use of hands to disengage once blockers have latched on. Has to fight to earn a stalemate in short yardage when his initial burst is contained and can be too easily rooted out by double-teams due to his lack of size.

Will be peppered with questions from scouts during interviews due to a well-documented sideline incident with Major Applewhite in which the head coach reminded him that the team's oversized jackets were reserved for active players (Oliver was sidelined with a knee injury), forcing him to take it off and prompting a shouting match that ultimately resulted in Oliver leaving the stadium at halftime. The knee injury that sidelined Oliver for four games in 2018 requires a thorough investigation from NFL doctors.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Aaron Donald, Los Angeles Rams — It goes without saying that comparing any college prospect to the NFL's reigning Defensive MVP is presumptuous, but that is the caliber of initial quickness and agility that Oliver provides. He is nowhere close (yet) to Donald when it comes to technique, needing substantial improvement in this area if he is to achieve his true potential, but the raw talent — and consistent production despite a poor schematic fit in college — speak for themselves.

**Grade: 8.4**

## 3. CHRISTIAN WILKINS, Clemson

6-3, 300 40 time: 5.04 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** In a class full of freaky athletes at defensive tackle, Wilkins just might be the most gifted, belying a compact frame that at first glance looks more classic run-stuffer than pass-deflecting penetrator.

A proven standout as a hand-in-the-dirt defensive lineman inside and out (and even as a stand-up edge rusher), Wilkins will generate early first-round interest from clubs regardless of their scheme. He projects best as a classic three-technique defensive tackle in a 4-3 alignment but has proven his ability to play multiple roles.

**STRENGTHS:** Wilkins has a short, stumpy frame well-suited to playing inside at defensive tackle. He possesses terrific initial quickness to split gaps and possesses the lateral agility and balance of a much smaller man, showing enough burst to cross the face of tackles when slid outside, record tackles while covering punts or converting fake punts on designed passes (2015) and runs (2016) for first downs — each of which he has accomplished during his Clemson career.

Wilkins complements his light steps with uncommon coordination between his hands and feet, marrying the two to slip, slide and wiggle his way out of blocks and pursuing laterally and downfield with reckless abandon. Wilkins possesses remarkable hand-eye coordination, snaking out an arm to trip up ball-carriers seemingly out of his grasp and timing his leap to tip passes at the line of scrimmage — including breaking up a school-record (for defensive ends) 10 in 2016.

A stout frame and strength help Wilkins hold up at the point of attack, including the ability to split double-teams. Though he was blessed with first-round athleticism, Wilkins plays like an undrafted free agent trying to make the team, pursuing laterally and downfield with passion and playing on three special teams units. He's a big man who can deliver the big hit, creating explosive collisions, but he is also a reliable wrap-up tackler.

Wilkins did not miss a game over his four seasons at Clemson and comes with a sterling reputation off the field, including earning Academic All-America accolades. A communications major with an upbeat personality, Wilkins is popular with teammates and the Clemson coaching staff.

**WEAKNESSES:** In an era in which NFL linemen seemingly get bigger every year, Wilkins checks in slightly smaller than the league average, lacking the sand in his pants some teams would prefer inside. This is especially evident against double-teams, where Wilkins is reliant upon splitting them to be effective, struggling to anchor and create a pile. He is athletic for his frame but does not project as a true defensive end in a 4-3 alignment, a role in which he starred for the Tigers in 2016. Though his gaudy tackle statistics are impressive, too many of them occur yards downfield.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Gerald McCoy, Tampa Bay Buccaneers — Comparing any college prospects to a

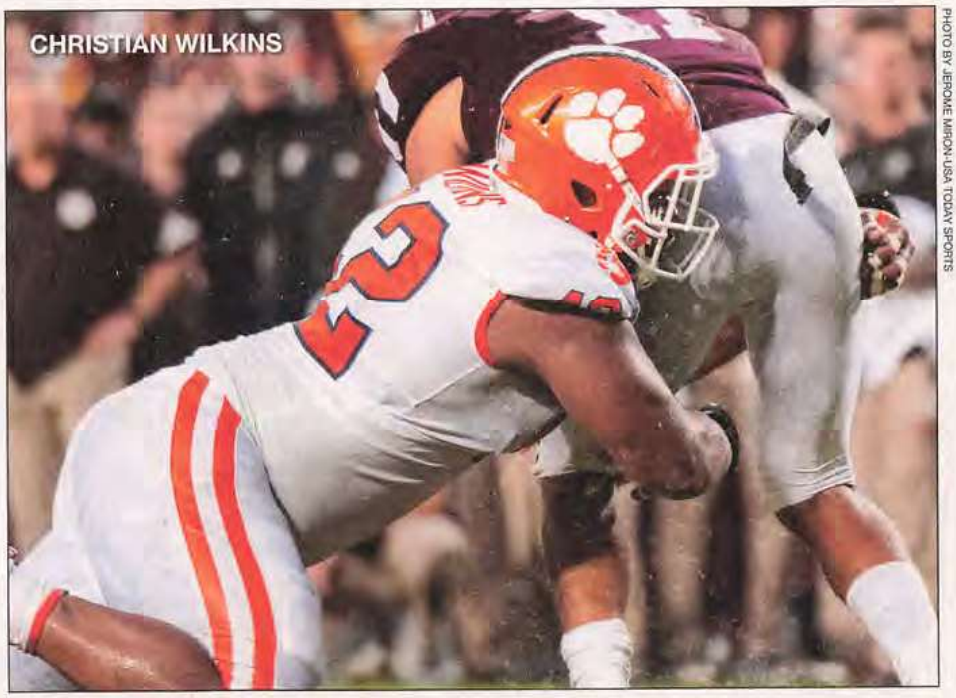


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PHOTO BY: ZACH BOLINGER/ICON SPORTSWIRE (ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA AP IMAGES)

six-time Pro Bowler, three-time All-Pro and former No. 3 overall pick is, of course, premature. But in terms of their consistency, dependability and off-beat personalities, there are just too many similarities to ignore. Wilkins possesses a slightly shorter, rounder frame but has a similar blend of initial quickness and instincts to project as a long-time NFL standout.

**Grade: 8.3**

### 4. JEFFERY SIMMONS, Mississippi State*

6-3, 300 40 time: 4.98 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The NFL opted not to invite Simmons to the 2019 Combine as a way of denouncing his 2016 conviction for assault, but don't expect the league's ruling to keep one of its 32 teams from investing an early draft pick on Simmons, who is widely regarded as a top 20 talent. He left the Bulldogs early for the draft after recording 163 career tackles, including 33 for loss and seven sacks in three seasons.

If satisfied with his character, Simmons' prototypical frame, power and experience playing up and down the defensive line will appeal to every team. He projects as a long-time starter, albeit one perhaps lacking the agility to ever record many hits on the quarterback and therefore garner Pro Bowl votes.

**STRENGTHS:** Looks the part of a modern NFL defensive tackle with broad shoulders, long arms, a trim middle and thick lower half. Reportedly has just 15 percent body fat, which for a 300-pounder is remarkable and a testament to the muscle developed during what appears to be a lifetime spent in the weight room. He is expected to impress during pre-draft workouts, with a 450-pound bench press and 600-pound squat reportedly to his credit.

Physical, powerful player who can overwhelm opponents with his strength and explosiveness in various ways, including with heavy hands to break the wrists of would-be blockers, the length and strength to anchor and being able to simply envelope ball-carriers for abrupt, emphatic stops.

Shows good initial quickness off the snap with a smooth over-arm swim move that Michael Phelps would admire. Good core flexibility to complement his pass rush moves, showing enough agility to squeeze through gaps and re-direct laterally to make plays behind the line of scrimmage. Two-time member of the SEC's All-Academic team and was among Mississippi State's most recognized players for their work in the community.

**WEAKNESSES:** A bit top-heavy with just average balance for the position. Negates his own impressive power at times with poor pad level, springing up at the snap rather than playing with his knees bent. Just phone booth quickness, topping out after a few steps outside of the tackle box. Just average agility and speed for the position when in pursuit, too often getting caught up in the trash.

Comes with significant character red flags, including a 2016 arrest following a physical altercation with a woman. Was ultimately charged with simple assault and disturbing the peace and pleaded no contest, reportedly paying about $500 in fines for the simple assault plea, $300 for being found guilty of malicious mischief and over $800 in restitution.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Michael Brockers, Los Angeles Rams — Brockers' teammates get most of the attention, but the 6-5, 305-pounder's size, strength and blue-collar playing style provides the foundation that helps create their big plays.

**Grade: 8.2**

### 5. DEXTER LAWRENCE, Clemson*

6-4, 340 40 time: 5.15 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** There are plenty of talented nose tackles to be found in the 2019 draft but none dominate opponents the way that Lawrence can. Simply bigger and stronger than most opponents, Lawrence is a bully whose presence makes the job easier on teammates, providing much greater value than his statistics suggest.

If teams are not satisfied with his answers to his positive test for a performance-enhancing substance — Ostarine — some club isn't going to let Lawrence slide too far. And if he (or supportive head coach Dabo Swinney) is able to convince teams that this was a one-time mistake, a top 20 pick is not out of the question. Players this big, powerful and athletic are rare.

**STRENGTHS:** Simply massive. Broad shoulders with a thick overall musculature that warrants an "oversized load" banner when he's driving home from the stadium. Carries some extra weight around his middle but not much; has a massive lower body, including tree trunks for limbs.

Surprisingly quick off the snap and offers explosive power as a bull rusher, routinely walking the center into the pocket when he's single blocked. Almost immovable when he keeps his pads low, including against double-teams. Sprawls his legs and leans into blockers, creating a wall. Surprisingly agile when he is not occupied with blockers, showing balance and good effort to play the keys and pursue laterally. Shows a quick burst to close when the ball is near, quietly leading Clemson with 15 QB hurries in 2018.

Showed improved awareness of passing lanes in 2018, getting his big paws up to knock down three passes in 2018 after recording just one his first two seasons. Has two blocked kicks to his credit, as well. Received public support from his coaches following the news of his suspension, which kept him on the sideline for last season's college football playoff.

**WEAKNESSES:** A classic run-stuffer in an era that doesn't place as much value on his role. Almost too big, catching a lot of blocks because he's so broad across the shoulders that he struggles to "get skinny" through gaps. While quick in short areas, Lawrence tires easily, making few plays outside of the tackle box.

Limited pass rush repertoire, relying almost exclusively on simple bull rushes. Pad level rises as he tires, negating his strength, which allows blockers to uproot him. Part of a steady rotation at Clemson and may need more careful monitoring of his weight in the NFL if he is expected to play more minutes. Requires a thorough vetting after testing positive for a banned substance.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Damon Harrison, Detroit Lions — At 6-3, 355 pou nds, "Snacks" Harrison is widely viewed as one of the NFL's best nose guards. The similarly-built Lawrence has this kind of potential, although it is worth noting that Harrison entered the NFL as an undrafted free agent, and it is the desire with which he's played since that has helped him become one of the league's highest paid interior defensive linemen.

**Grade: 8.1**

### 6. JERRY TILLERY, Notre Dame

6-7, 305 40 time: 5.15 1st-2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** From his size, talent and medical evaluation, to his unique interests away from the game, Tillery is one of the more fascinating prospects of the 2019 draft. He signed with Notre Dame as a touted recruit out of Shreveport, La., but didn't put it together until later in his career in South Bend.

His length, strength and new-found maturity suggest that he'd fit best as a two-gap, block-eating base defensive end at the next level with proven disruptive ability inside, as well. That position and schematic versatility could earn Tillery a first round selection.

**STRENGTHS:** Quite possibly the most physically imposing player of the draft. Blessed with rare size, including height, broad shoulders, vines for arms and excellent overall weight-distribution. Surprisingly quick off the ball; shows impressive agility for a man of his size, able to get home on twists or when pursuing laterally and downfield. Further, Tillery is better at anchoring than his size suggests, showing incredible core strength and leg drive to root himself to the ground and hold up, despite often losing the leverage battle due to his height.

Good upper-body strength, including forceful hands. Isn't exactly nimble but generates impressive closing speed when he has a runway, building up momentum for some massive collisions. Incredible wingspan gives him quite a tackle radius with good strength in his hands to grab hold of ball-carriers while still engaged with blockers.

A well-rounded individual outside of football. Reportedly taught himself how to write left-handed at the

age of 5 simply because so few people have the ability to do so. Interested in worldly affairs, communicates with congressmen, follows the stock markets (his degree is in economics) and travels outside of the country, including to South Africa, Italy, Ireland and Poland.

**WEAKNESSES:** Like most defenders his size, Tillery is reliant upon his size and power as pass rusher, lacking the quickness, sustained speed or flexibility to run the arc as an outside rusher. Limited awareness and hand-eye coordination to disrupt passing lanes, failing to register even a single tipped pass and just one kick (PAT vs. Florida State, 2018) during his college career.

Naturally powerful but can be moved off the ball by shorter, smaller blockers due to poor pad level. Needs to show more awareness of trap blocks coming his way. Struggled with immaturity early in his career. Was suspended for an undisclosed violation of team rules prior to a Fiesta Bowl showdown with Ohio State at the end of his freshman season (2015) and was caught on tape stepping on the leg of one Southern California player and kicking at the head of another during the team's rivalry game in 2016.

Was invited to the Senior Bowl but was unable to play, citing a previously undisclosed injury.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Stephon Tuitt, Pittsburgh Steelers — The 6-6, 303-pound Tuitt has proven a rock as a two-gapping defensive end for the Steelers in their beloved 3-4 scheme since being drafted out of Notre Dame with the 46th overall pick in 2014. If teams are satisfied that Tillery is committed to maximizing his potential, his similar frame and game warrant consideration at least this early.

**Grade: 8.0**

### 7. DRE'MONT JONES, Ohio State*

6-2, 286 40 time: 4.96 1st-2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The best indication of the caliber of talent that Urban Meyer brought to Ohio State is the fact that when star defensive end Nick Bosa suffered a groin injury and missed much of the 2018 season, Jones emerged as an All-American. Jones was one of the most productive defensive linemen in the Big Ten as a fourth-year junior, far surpassing his previous career totals in tackles for loss (13) and sacks (8.5).

His 'tweener-ish frame suggests a jack-of-all-trades type of performer who projects best on a traditional four-man front. While any player with just one dominant season is an inherently risky proposition, Jones' quickness and improved technique are reasons for optimism.

**STRENGTHS:** Very good initial quickness off the snap, instantly closing the gap between himself and the would-be blocker. Greatly improved coordination between his upper and lower body as a pass rusher in 2018, exhibiting a powerful hand swipe and over-arm swim move to complement quick feet and core flexibility. Possesses the agility to get home on twists and stunts, showing good balance and an exciting closing burst when the ball is near.

Reliable performer, starting in 37 of 39 career games for the Buckeyes after he played only two years in high school, suggesting that his best football may still lie ahead of him.

**WEAKNESSES:** While explosive off the snap, Jones is just as quick standing up, giving blockers an expanded target and too often losing the leverage battle. Needs to learn to play with better pad level to avoid getting washed out in the running game. Lacks ideal bulk for an interior defensive line role and does not possess ideal speed and bend to warrant converting to defensive end. Shows just average awareness of passing lanes at this time, recording four passes defended in 39 career games.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Michael Bennett, Philadelphia Eagles — Like the 6-4, 274-pound Bennett, Jones' best attribute is his initial quickness and agility to make plays at or near the line of scrimmage. Just like it took Bennett (a former undrafted free agent) a few years in the NFL to harness his raw talent, Jones would be best served as a complementary piece early in his career with the hopes that he will develop into a full-fledged star in time.

**Grade: 7.9**

### 8. ISAIAH BUGGS, Alabama

6-3, 295 40 time: 5.00 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Two numbers will often be cited when discussing Buggs and his fit in the NFL. There is 9.5, which is the sack total he posted in 2018 to lead Alabama. And there is 30 7/8, which is the measurement in inches of his disproportionately short arms.

Neither tell the full story.

Despite his gaudy production, Buggs is more of a classic run-stuffer than a true threat to quarterbacks. And while his lack of elite length could push him further down draft boards than his production would indicate, his understanding of leverage, raw power and balance through contact are traits that will earn him second-round consideration and quite possibly a starting role in the NFL within a year or two.

Buggs, a former No. 1 recruit out of junior college, is likely to be a fascinating player in the draft.

**STRENGTHS:** Built like a refrigerator with a square-ish frame and a lot of his weight in his lower half, allowing him to anchor very effectively, including against double-teams. Sprawls like an All-American wrestler, extending his legs back and dropping his hips to while showing excellent upper-body strength to stack and shed would-be blockers in the hole.

Shows balance through contact to twist, spin and claw his way towards the quarterback. Scheme and position versatile, boasting the quickness and agility to split gaps as well as the raw power to hold up to double-teams. Highly competitive, jawing with opponents and rallying teammates. Seems to enjoy the physicality of the game.

**WEAKNESSES:** Is not the pass rusher that his gaudy sack total suggests. Quick for his size but lacks dynamic wiggle or an established pass rush repertoire to create sacks on his own, instead padding his numbers by catching quarterbacks as they escaped others on Alabama's fearsome front. Will surrender a significant reach advantage to the longer-armed interior linemen he'll face in the NFL. While Buggs' lack of length did not adversely impact his ability to hold up against the run at Alabama, he was unable to disrupt passing lanes much, tipping just three passes in two seasons at Alabama.

**Grade: 7.8**

### 9. GERALD WILLIS III, Miami

6-3, 305 40 time: 5.10 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Even in a spectacular year for defensive linemen, Willis' raw talent jumps off the screen. So, too, however, does his litany of red flags that could result in him remaining on the board much longer than his ability suggests.

Willis signed with Florida out of high school before run-ins with teammates and coaches led him to transfer to Miami — where he sat out two full seasons (2015, 2017) — before re-emerging as one of the country's most disruptive interior defensive linemen in 2018. When he's focused, Willis wins with a terrific blend of initial quickness, agility and refined hand technique, making him a bowling ball of butcher knives.

**STRENGTHS:** Short, compact frame with much of his weight distributed in his lower half. Generates impressive initial quickness and torque due to his powerful lower body, showing the ability to spurt through gaps and anchor well when he keeps his pads low. Shows an impressive array of hand technique, including a quick push-pull, over-arm swim and powerful club to complement surprising quickness and lateral agility.

## SPOTLIGHT

### Dontavius Russell, Auburn

*It is going to be tough for Auburn to replace a four-year starter like yourself?* What do you think about the guys coming up next for the Tigers? I think they are going to be just fine. Just like when they had to replace guys like Montravius Adams or Gabe Wright in the years I was there and then Derrick (Brown) emerged. I just believe that when you have a caliber of school like Auburn, you're just going to be able to reload, especially along the defensive line.

*Describe what kind of player NFL teams are getting with you.* I'm just a steady guy, you know. It is just a situation where I'll be able to produce from whatever position you put me in. I learn fast. I'm just a good, all-around defensive lineman that I feel like offers a lot to an NFL team.

*Is there an NFL team that you grew up rooting for?* Well, kind of the same with the way it worked out and my choosing Auburn, I grew up liking the same team that my parents liked. My dad was a huge Dallas Cowboys fans and so that was who I watched a lot as a little kid.

*Is there anything between the Senior Bowl and the NFL draft that you think is important to show scouts?* Oh yeah, I just want to showcase my athleticism. I want to show them that I'm not just a 320-pound guy good at just a certain couple of things, that I'm more athletic than my weight shows.

PHOTO BY AP PHOTO/VASHA HUNT

Good competitiveness to spin off of would-be blockers, fighting to remain in the play even if initially blocked. Shows good effort in lateral and downfield pursuit. Earned rave reviews from teammates and Miami coaches for his improved dedication and maturity in 2018.

**WEAKNESSES:** Undeniably gifted but has teased more than dominated throughout his career with plenty of evidence to suggest that he may lack the dedication to truly maximize his talent. Bad body for the position with too much weight around his middle and just average height and length. Appears more interested in racking up his own statistics than playing quality team defense, vacating his gap responsibilities in an attempt to make plays but also leaving wide lanes for savvy runners to exploit on cutbacks.

Comes with off-field red-flags that require thorough vetting, including the specifics that led to his transfer from Florida as well as the "personal reasons" that led him to sit out the 2017 season. Was invited to the 2019 Senior Bowl but was flagged during his physical and did not compete, further complicating his final grade.

**Grade: 7.6**

## 10. KINGSLEY KEKE, Texas A&M

6-3, 286 40 time: 4.90 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Proving agile enough to provide a pass rush, Keke benefitted from the more active defensive scheme preferred by new Aggies head coach Jimbo Fisher, jumping from one sack in 2017 to 7.5 in a breakout final campaign that earned him an invitation to Mobile, Ala. for the Senior Bowl.

Projecting as more of a complementary threat than star in the NFL, Keke's value lies with his ability to play multiple roles along the defensive line, potentially saving a team a roster spot.

**STRENGTHS:** Solidly-built with excellent length (34 1/2-inch arms) and a thick lower half, offering a frame well-suited to playing multiple roles at the next level. Flashes an explosive burst off the snap, showing enough speed to challenge flat-footed tackles on the edge. Shows some core flexibility, dipping, ducking to elude blockers in tight quarters and showing above-average bend to wrap the corner or handle twist and stunt responsibilities.

Sprawls well to hold up at the point of attack despite often surrendering 25-plus pounds. Length and grip strength show up in his ability to bench press and cast would-be blockers aside when the ball is near.

**WEAKNESSES:** Jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none-type with a 'tweener frame that appears maxed out. Inconsistent get-off as he attempts to anticipate the snap count, occasionally guessing wrong and being the last player off the ball. While quicker than he looks, Keke isn't going to beat many NFL offensive tackles with his speed rush and currently lacks the repertoire of hand technique to defeat interior blocks quickly enough to get cleanly through the line of scrimmage.

**Grade: 7.3**

## 11. KHALEN SAUNDERS, Western Illinois

6-1, 322 40 time: 5.20 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Saunders made quite the impression at the Senior Bowl, opting to compete in it while his wife delivered the couple's first child (a girl named Kambridge), turning heads with an impromptu gymnastics routine following practice in which he completed a dazzling backflip and flashed the initial quickness and lateral agility that helped him earn a reputation as the "Aaron Donald of the FCS."

As his flip and eye-popping production (204 tackles, 34.5 tackles for loss, 18 sacks and four forced fumbles) suggest, Saunders is a fantastic athlete who may very well outplay some of the more traditionally-built defensive tackles selected ahead of him.

**STRENGTHS:** Almost shocking raw athleticism, which shows up in his initial burst, as well as lateral agility to dance down the line of scrimmage and split gaps. Accelerates smoothly for a big man. Unusual agility presents some interesting possibilities for twists and stunts for a creative defensive play-caller in the NFL. Built like a refrigerator, possessing a stubby, square-ish frame that gives him a natural leverage advantage. Generates enough power as a bull rusher to walk blockers deep into the backfield due to his leg drive and good arm length (32 3/8 inches).

**WEAKNESSES:** More agile than powerful at the point of attack, getting knocked off the ball by the bigger, quicker blockers he faced at the Senior Bowl after dominating at the lower level. Negates his own strength by standing up at the snap, leaving his chest exposed and losing his natural leverage advantage. Catches a lot of blocks because he is so broad. Terrific effort as a pass defender, watching the eyes of the quarterback and timing his leap to affect their vision, but he doesn't clear much ground with his jumps and leaves himself vulnerable to being knocked to the ground when doing so.

**Grade: 7.2**

## 12. TERRY BECKNER JR., Missouri

6-3, 295 40 time: 5.08 3rd-4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** This year's extraordinary crop of defensive linemen could make a player with medical baggage like Beckner slip later in the draft than his talent warrants, making him a potential steal. He is a classic three-technique penetrating defensive tackle, using his initial quickness and that awesome swim move to make splashy plays at the line of scrimmage, projecting as at least a part of the rotation early in his NFL career.

**STRENGTHS:** Quicker than most men his size, flashing intriguing initial get-off burst and agility to slip gaps and make big plays at or behind the line of scrimmage. Much more flexible than his frame suggests, twisting to "get skinny" and showing quick, active hands to swim over or slap away would-be blockers. Sets up a terrific swim move, picking his spots before unleashing a wicked combination of lateral agility and a quick overarm stroke. Easy movement skills — including operating forward, reverse and laterally — which suggest that he could be very effective on twists and stunts, though he was not asked to do this much at Missouri.

**WEAKNESSES:** Slightly undersized by today's standards with relatively slim shoulders and some extra flab around his middle. Poor pad level negates his strength, too often getting blown off the ball in the running game. Leaves himself vulnerable to cut blocks because he stands up at the snap. Only average awareness, struggling to pick up the ball again once he loses sight of it. Blindly rushes upfield against screens and draws. Multiple serious knee injuries in his past — requiring surgery on both — and therefore comes with plenty of medical concerns. Tore his right ACL and MCL in November 2015 and the left ACL the following October.

**Grade: 7.1**

## 13. DONTAVIUS RUSSELL, Auburn

6-3, 319 40 time: 5.10 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** While overshadowed by splashier talents, Russell proved to be Mr. Reliable at Auburn, starting 49 of a possible 52 games over his career and even opting to compete at the Senior Bowl. He isn't going to wow anyone with his agility as a pass rusher — recording just six career sacks — but he's a steady run-stuffing presence whose size and strength will appeal to 4-3 and 3-4 disciples.

Pro-ready out of the box, Russell should be able to mix into the rotation as a rookie. Better yet, given all of the talent on the defensive line in this draft, his blue collar (rather than blue chip) game likely will have him still on the board on Day Three, making Russell a potentially terrific value.

**STRENGTHS:** Naturally large man who carries his nearly 320 pounds well with good overall distribution throughout his frame with a thick lower half. Flashes an explosive burst that can catch would-be blockers off-guard when he times the snap count. Powerful. Good upper-body strength for the push/pull to disengage from blockers and understands leverage. Good acceleration for a big man when he has a lane toward the ball-carrier and may run well for the stopwatch.

**WEAKNESSES:** Steady Eddie but lacks the disruptive qualities to move the meter. More of a read-and-react type at the point of attack than a consistent penetrator, lacking the agility and core flexibility to re-direct quickly to stalk ball-carriers and make many plays on his own if his initial push into backfield doesn't serve up an easy stop.

**Grade: 6.9**

## 14. RENELL WREN, Arizona State

6-5, 315 40 time: 4.95 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Wren is a better athlete than football player at this point, only emerging as a starter for the Sun Devils as a redshirt senior. That may not mean much on some campuses, but Tempe has hardly proven to be a hotbed of talent for NFL defensive linemen with just one player earning a top 100 selection (the Chicago Bears took DT Will Sutton 82nd overall in 2014) since Terrell Suggs was drafted 10th overall back in 2003.

Wren's upside warrants early round consideration but, make no mistake, he's a legitimate project who will require patience.

**STRENGTHS:** Physically imposing, boasting above average height, arm length (33 3/4 inches) and an athletic, evenly proportioned frame that suggests he should be one of the first players off the team bus. Terrific initial explosiveness off the snap, routinely disrupting the action with his upfield burst. Consistently the first off the ball with the ability to blow up the center and ruin short-yardage conversion attempts.

Uses his length and explosive upper-body strength to bench press would-be blockers, rag-dolling opponents with a push/pull move to disengage. Generates impressive power with his bull rush, walking the center deep into the backfield to re-establish the line of scrimmage and crowd the quarterback.

**WEAKNESSES:** A classic case of looking like Superman and playing like Clark Kent. Lacks football instincts, instead resorting to a bull-in-a-china-shop playing style that appears better suited to competing as a professional wrestler. While explosive with his initial burst, too often Wren just flies into the window, failing to re-direct and pursue the football laterally or downfield. Stands up at the snap, losing the leverage battle due to his poor pad level and allowing shorter players to control him.

**Grade: 6.4**

## 15. BYRON COWART, Maryland

6-3, 297 40 time: 4.90 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** If the name sounds familiar, it should. Cowart — then a 280-pound defensive end — signed with Auburn out of high school in 2015 as the top-rated prep regardless of position, according to some recruiting experts. He struggled amid huge expectations and wound up transferring to Maryland, where he grew into a legitimate NFL prospect as a defensive tackle.

While not the elite prospect his hype would suggest,

Cowart's prototypical frame, strength and resiliency should result in a mid-round pick — with a chance to develop into a better player in the NFL than he was for the Tigers or Terrapins.

**STRENGTHS:** Physically imposing frame. Terrific upper-body strength which shows up in his ability to ragdoll would-be blockers and drag down ballcarriers while still being occupied with blockers. Good push/pull move to wrench himself free and flashes good lateral agility and closing burst when the ball-carrier is near. Earned the respect of teammates and the Maryland coaching staff for his dedication towards improving his own game and selfless play.

**WEAKNESSES:** Just average initial quickness and agility for rushing the passer. Stiff in his core, limiting his ability to elude pass-blockers. While showing good effort in pursuit, Cowart tops out quickly, showing limited ability to make plays outside of the tackle box. Negates his own strength by allowing his pads to get too high. Lacks ideal instincts, gets caught up in the one-on-one battles with blockers at the line of scrimmage and loses track of the ball.

**Grade: 6.3**

### 16. DEMARCUS CHRISTMAS, Florida St.

6-4, 302 40 time: 5.20 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** As dependable as the cold in December, Christmas played in 51 games (the last 37 of them were starts) for the talent-rich Seminoles, recording 105 tackles, including 10.5 for loss and 3.5 sacks during that time. His inability to consistently impact the quarterback means Christmas will have to wait until Day 3 this year.

**STRENGTHS:** Classic square-framed run-stuffer, built like a freezer chest and hard to move in the running game. Rocks would-be blockers onto their heels with his punch, pushing the pocket as a bull rusher with excellent leg drive. Frame, pad level and weight room strength combine to make Christmas a very effective interior run-stuffer. Feels the double-team coming and sprawls out, growing roots into the turf to anchor. Limited agility but gives good effort laterally. Iron-like grip allows him to pull down ball-carriers while still being occupied with blockers. Reads the eyes of quarterbacks and shows effort and anticipation to disrupt passing lanes, tipping 13 passes over his career.

**WEAKNESSES:** Just average initial quickness and agility to split gaps or impact the quarterback, resorting mostly to simple bull rushes. Speed tops out too quickly, showing minimal ability to impact plays outside of the tackle box. Below average arm length for his frame (32 1/4 inches), giving up valuable real estate in the close quarters of the pit.

**Grade: 6.2**

### 17. GREG GAINES, Washington

6-1, 307 40 time: 5.20 5th-6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Voted by Pac-12 offensive lineman as the best defensive lineman in the league in 2018. At the Senior Bowl, Gaines showed off the competitive nature that has earned him comparisons to retiring Buffalo Bills standout nose guard Kyle Williams. Like Williams, Gaines lacks ideal size and isn't going to run down many skill position players from behind, which makes his 149 career tackles (including 7.5 for loss and 4.5 sacks) that much more impressive and further indicates just how effective he is in his run-stuffing role.

In a draft as deep with defensive linemen as this one, Gaines isn't likely to hear his name called until deep into Day 3, but he'll eventually outplay that, just as Williams — a six-time Pro Bowler — did after lasting until the fifth round (No. 134 overall) of the 2006 draft despite a stellar college career at LSU.

## 3 TO WATCH

### SLEEPER

**Renell Wren, Arizona State**
Wren didn't even emerge as a starter for the Sun Devils until former NFL head coach Herm Edwards took over in 2018, but his shocking combination of size and explosiveness is certainly intriguing.

### COULD DISAPPOINT

**Gerald Willis III, Miami**
After taking a year away from the game, Willis returned to Miami with renewed passion and enjoyed the best season of his career. But he comes with size and scheme limitations, along with his inconsistent commitment.

### SMALL SCHOOL STUD

**Khalen Saunders, Western Illinois**
From his fiancee giving birth to their first child to mesmerizing scouts with a running backflip at 320 pounds, Saunders stole the spotlight at the Senior Bowl — where, by the way, he also proved that his strength and quickness were clearly NFL-caliber.

**STRENGTHS:** Powerful interior run stuffer. Squatty frame conducive to winning the leverage battle at the line of scrimmage. Broad-shouldered with a square-ish frame overall. Active hands and is surprisingly slippery as a pass rusher, showing good initial quickness and lateral agility. Terrific effort in pursuit, including downfield. Physical tackler who isn't afraid to leave his feet to leave an impression on ball-carriers, generating impressive knockdown power as a hitter and generally wrapping his arms for good measure.

**WEAKNESSES:** Short, stubby frame with below-average arm length (31 1/8 inches), virtually guaranteeing that every interior lineman he faces in the NFL will have a reach advantage over him. While surprisingly quick in a phone booth, Gaines maxes out quickly, showing limited ability to make plays outside of the tackle box. Limited effectiveness in the passing game, lacking the burst, wiggle and bend to provide much of a pass rush. Lacks the height to affect passing lanes.

**Grade: 6.0**

### 18. TRYSTEN HILL, UCF*

6-1, 315 40 time: 5.20 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Hill's untraditional build and fall from grace at UCF contributed to his largely being overshadowed in this year's spectacular defensive line class. Explosiveness like Hill's won't go unnoticed by scouts, however, and he will outplay this projection if he can convince teams that he possesses the maturity to take full advantage of his talent.

**STRENGTHS:** Explosive. Almost shockingly quick off the snap for a man of his size, consistently ranking first off the ball (see Temple, Memphis games). Can cross the face of the guard in a blink, using a powerful rip to get past him and into the backfield to change the line of scrimmage. Plays with a plan, altering his burst to keep interior lineman off balance. Shows good agility for twists and stunts, twisting to get skinny through gaps while generating impressive momentum.

Carries some dynamite in his hands, breaking wrists to disengage and track the ball. Flashes moments of almost rabid pursuit, sprinting downfield with little regard for his own safety or others.

**WEAKNESSES:** Unimpressive physique with disproportionate weight around his middle. Top-heavy and his balance suffers because of it. Too often gets caught up in the trash in lateral pursuit and is too easily knocked to the turf. Needs to show greater awareness of trap and cut blocks. Comes with character red flags, including multiple run-ins with UCF's staff. Only started once last season. Reportedly had poor practice habits and didn't initially believe he was a good fit in the new defense, exploring transfer options.

**Grade: 5.8**

### 19. DAYLON MACK, Texas A&M

6-1, 327 40 time: 5.20 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Teammate Kingsley Keke earned most of the press during the season, but it was Mack, a former five-star recruit, who delivered at the Senior Bowl, using his stout frame to slam shut running lanes while turning heads with his power and underrated agility during pass rush drills.

With the NFL shifting more to the pass than ever before, classic zero technique nose guards like Mack are not as valued as they once were, pushing him well into Day 3, but if he commits to playing with the same intensity he showed as a senior — his first season as a starter at A&M — Mack has the raw talent to surprise.

**STRENGTHS:** Looks and plays like a cannon ball, firing off the snap low and hard to reset the line of scrimmage. Stubby frame provides blockers a relatively small target, a fact amplified by Mack's natural leverage advantage. At his best out of the four-point stance, flashing terrific initial explosiveness and stellar leg drive to knock the center back on his heels. Much quicker than he looks, showing the ability to split gaps with his initial surge and surprising ballcarriers with his quick closing ability (Mississippi).

**WEAKNESSES:** Reliant on his first-step explosiveness or a simple bull rush to push the pocket, showing little in terms of hand technique to disengage from blockers. Just phone booth quickness, topping out quickly and making few plays outside of the tackle box, despite good effort in pursuit. Pad level rises as he tires. Too often is left playing patty-cake with blockers against the pass, showing rudimentary rush moves.

**Grade: 5.6**

## WORTH WATCHING

**Ed Alexander, LSU (6-2, 331)***
Started to play well late last season as he began to put some knee issues behind him.

**Daniel Wise, Kansas (6-2, 290)**
After junior season, NFL Advisory Board suggested filling out his frame and improving his strength.

**Kevin Givens, Penn State (6-1, 288)***
Surprised many by declaring early, but his toolbox includes quickness and versatility.

**Michael Dogbe, Temple (6-2, 280)**
One of the strongest players in the draft, Dogbe benched press 505 pounds during summer workouts.

**Chris Slayton, Syracuse (6-3, 309)**
Strong dude. Combine invitee. Said Syracuse coach Dino Babers: "We're losing an 'M' and an 'N' with an 'A' in the middle."

*For further analysis of the 2019 defensive tackles, visit www.nfldraftscout.com.*

# Inside Linebackers

**OVERVIEW** The 2019 NFL draft is loaded with quality defenders, but the position that is clearly weakest on that side of the ball this year is traditional off-ball linebackers.

That is not to say there aren't future starters to be found.

LSU's reigning Butkus Award winner Devin White has the look of a future Pro Bowler. And teams searching for speedy heat-seeking missiles to combat today's pass-catching specialists out of the backfield? Devin Bush from fellow blueblood program Michigan fits the bill.

But don't expect a repeat of last year, when the Chicago Bears made 2017 Butkus Award winner Roquan Smith the first off-ball 'backer to earn a top 10 pick since the Carolina Panthers nabbed future All-Pro Luke Kuechly ninth overall in 2012.

And don't expect rookie Pro Bowlers to be found outside of the top half of the first round, which is where the Dallas Cowboys landed Leighton Vander Esch and the Indianapolis Colts discovered Darius Leonard, who not only won the NFL's Defensive Rookie of Year, he led the league in tackles (163), while chipping in seven sacks, 10 passes broken up and four forced fumbles.

It is worth noting that Vander Esch, Leonard and San Francisco's Fred Warner — the NFL's three leading rookie tacklers in 2018 — entered the draft as seniors. The instincts and refined technique that comes with starting multiple seasons is not quite as apparent in this year's class.

**2019 CLASS GRADE**

**C**

PHOTO BY AP PHOTO/RICK SCUTERI

*Denotes underclassman

## 1. DEVIN WHITE, LSU*

6-0, 240 40 time: 4.64 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The 2019 NFL Draft might be best known for the talent playing along the defensive line, but a strong argument could be made that the best defender in the country last season was White, LSU's consensus All-American and Butkus Award-winning linebacker.

In fact, with all due respect to former Georgia Bulldog star Roquan Smith — the 2017 Butkus Award winner and eighth overall pick in 2018 — White was arguably the top linebacker in college football in each of the past two seasons. On and off the field, he looks like a future franchise pillar and a rare inside linebacker worthy of top 20 consideration.

**STRENGTHS:** Built like a Sherman tank with a compact, powerful frame and excellent overall weight distribution. White wins with an ideal blend of sideline-to-sideline speed, toughness to take on and quickly discard would-be blockers and excellent diagnosis skills, which help him play even faster than he'll time in workouts. White plays like the former running back he is, showing excellent stop and start quickness to avoid would-be blockers in tight spaces, as well as the vision and anticipation to hit holes at full speed.

He is a true thumper, generating eye-popping collisions with dramatic closing speed and supreme stopping power due to his compact frame and iron-like grip. Resourceful tackler, showing not only true knockdown power (three forced fumbles in 2018) but also the ability to wrestle ball-carriers to the ground due to above-average strength and tenacity. Showed improved awareness and timing in coverage in 2018, doubling his previous career-high with six passes broken up.

Voted a "permanent" team captain over 2017-18 seasons. Beloved by the coaching staff, players and fans at LSU for his dedication to the program and never-say-die attitude. Struggled with the decision to leave LSU early for the NFL despite receiving a first-round grade from the NFL Advisory Committee, penning a nearly 2,000-word letter thanking dozens in and around the program by name for their support.

**WEAKNESSES:** Thick frame with just average arm length. As a result, White is, at times, too willing to absorb hits from oncoming blockers before sprawling to anchor, surrendering yardage. Further, he lacks the wingspan to lasso much outside of his frame, limiting his tackle radius in pursuit. Takes sharp angles to the ball, leaving potential cut-back lanes to exploit. Trusts his teammates to rally to the ball, grabbing and fighting

## FLASHBACK

**It takes at least three years to determine the success or failure of draft picks**

*Here's a snapshot of recent hits and misses*

### Diamond in the Rough

**Blake Martinez, Packers (Fourth round, 2016)**
How about this for consistent excellence? Martinez, the 131st overall pick three years ago, tied with Seattle's Bobby Wagner for the league lead with 144 tackles in 2017 and finished second behind Darius Leonard with the same amount this season.

### Swing and Miss

**Stephone Anthony, Dolphins (First round, 2015)**
Anthony looked like a future star for the Saints as a rookie, registering 112 tackles, but he has recorded just 38 games in three years since, including seven last year as a backup in Miami.

### Breakout Player

**Jaylon Smith, Cowboys (Second round, 2017)**
Finally over the horrific knee injury that pushed the projected top 10 pick into the second round of the 2017 draft, Smith quietly led all second-year NFL defenders with 121 tackles.

## PROTOTYPE

### ✔ Read & React

**Devin White, LSU**
Showing a nose for the ball, ideal closing speed and a taste for collisions in the hole, White won the 2018 Butkus Award as the nation's top linebacker and may have been even better a year earlier.

### ✔ Run Defense

**Tre Lamar**
Instincts, speed and physicality are nice but when it comes to blowing up fullbacks in the hole and intimidating opposing runners, nothing beats size. Lamar — at 250-plus pounds — certainly possesses that.

### ✔ Pass Defense

**T.J. Edwards, Wisconsin**
Edwards appears to possess just average athleticism for coverage duties, but the 10 interceptions and 15 passes broken up over his career are a testament to his instincts and soft hands.

### ✔ Tackling

**Devin Bush, Michigan**
He may not impress during weigh-ins but few can match Bush's closing speed. Pound-for-pound, there is not a more explosive, combative hitter among this year's linebacker corps.

### ✔ Pass Rush/Blitz

**David Long, West Virginia**
Long lacks ideal size for a pass rusher, but his agility and closing speed stand out when blitzing, resulting in 12.5 career sacks, including a position-leading seven in 2018.

### ✔ Intangibles

**Bobby Okereke, Stanford**
An Eagle Scout who earned his Master's in media studies after achieving his undergraduate degree in Management, Science and Engineering, Okereke gets high marks off the field, as well as on it — where he started the past three seasons and was voted a team captain in 2018.

with runners on occasion, rather than simply squaring them up with clean, closed tackles.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Eric Kendricks, Minnesota Vikings — Since being selected 45th overall four years ago, Kendricks has led the Vikings in tackles each season, averaging 105 a season, with the majority of them solos. Instinctive, athletic and physical, both players are quality "quarterbacks on defense" an NFL team can build around.

**Grade: 8.4**

### 2. DEVIN BUSH JR., Michigan*

5-11, 233 40 time: 4.67 1st-2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Injuries (and talent around him) contributed to Bush's numbers slipping in 2018, but the same speed and physicality that captured the imagination of college fans and NFL scouts was still quite evident. Bush is an exciting talent with the combination of speed and physicality every NFL team wants. His gambling style can lead to big plays for and against him, however, and teams will want to proceed cautiously, given that he is undersized and already has dealt with shoulder injuries.

**STRENGTHS:** Shorter than preferred but otherwise possesses an ideal frame for inside linebacker, including a thick lower half. Easy mover who accelerates in a flash due to his quick feet and short, choppy steps, which help him remain balanced through contact. Possesses legitimate sideline-to-sideline speed to beat backs to the corner. Good agility to avoid would-be blockers while showing impressive power in his punch to disengage. Highly physical hitter who seems to enjoy the combative element of the sport and never backs down from the challenge of a bigger opponent.

Occasionally leaves his feet to spark massive collisions but doesn't have to, showing late, explosive closing speed to consistently catch ball-carriers by surprise. Agile and aware in coverage. Athletic bloodlines: Father, Devin Bush Sr., played at Florida State and spent eight seasons at safety in the NFL.

**WEAKNESSES:** Lack of ideal height shows up on film as Bush loses sight of the ball too often, running himself out of plays. Takes highly aggressive, almost reckless angles to the football, which leave savvy runners cut-back lanes to exploit. Too willing to leave his feet as a tackler, needing to show greater patience and strength for the cleaner, wrap-up stop rather than relying on his knockdown power. Needs to do a better job at ripping the ball free, failing to force a fumble over his college career despite his knack for big hits.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Myles Jack, Jacksonville Jaguars — Jack and Bush share more in common than just being highly touted as college and NFL prospects. Both have the agility, speed and physical nature to make the flashy plays, but each can also be guilty of trusting their instincts too much, resulting in some big plays for the offense.

**Grade: 8.2**

### 3. MACK WILSON, Alabama*

6-1, 239 40 time: 4.73 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Wilson produced less-than-eye-popping statistics as a true junior in 2018 (65 tackles, including 4.5 for loss and the only sack of his career), but he nonetheless opted to give up his remaining eligibility to head to the NFL, leaving teams little choice but to project what he could become with a little more seasoning.

Wilson, who was only a one-year full-time starter in college, isn't as technically refined as some of the star linebackers Alabama has sent to the NFL in recent years, but few boast his raw athleticism. The former five-star recruit will make an immediate impact on special teams with the upside to project as a future standout starter, with the size, speed and strength to handle any of the three traditional off-ball linebacker roles.

Basically, it appears he's just scratching the surface of his potential.

**STRENGTHS:** Looks the part of an NFL linebacker, including a rocked-up upper body and thick lower half. Good balance to hold his ground, bending his knees and sprawling to anchor, slipping off blocks to drag down ball-carriers attempting to run by. Easy athleticism, including terrific initial quickness and above-average straight-line speed for the position.

Can generate impressive power with little runway, a testament to his closing speed and compact, powerful frame. Good coordination and balance when operating in reverse, dropping back easily and showing the loose hips to turn and accelerate smoothly. Good awareness in pass coverage; reads the eyes of the quarterback to get an early break and shows good timing on his leaps and when swiping at the ball. Soft hands to turn PBUs into INTs, converting six of his 13 career passes defensed into interceptions.

Showed admirable toughness in playing through a foot fracture for much of the 2017 season, missing

PHOTO BY MATTHEW EMMONS-USA TODAY SPORTS

just two games for an injury that ultimately required surgery.

**WEAKNESSES:** Not yet the sum of his parts. Spotty instincts, often taking false steps and relying upon his athleticism to recover. Can struggle to disengage once blockers latch on, needing to show greater strength and technique with his hands. Erratic strike zone as a tackler, too often attempting to grab hold at the chest level and wrestle ball-carriers to the ground rather than consistently driving through and wrapping them around the waist or lower.

**COMPARES TO:** Alec Ogletree, New York Giants — He has gained 10 pounds and more consistency since college, but the Rams made Ogletree (6-2, 242) the 30th overall selection of the 2013 draft because he showed off a similar brand of raw athleticism as Wilson during his abbreviated SEC career.

**Grade: 7.9**

### 4. TRE LAMAR, Clemson*

6-3, 255 40 time: 4.70 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The massive Lamar emerged as one of the top linebackers in the country during Clemson's national championship season, earning second-team All-America honors and making 85 tackles, including 5.5 for loss and three sacks. Bigger than some of this year's top defensive linemen, Lamar is a classic inside run-stuffing thumper well-suited to a traditional 3-4 scheme. A true monster in the middle.

**STRENGTHS:** Surprisingly light on his feet and flexible for a big man, showing good lateral agility and suddenness to close downhill when he has a lane. Plays with a bull-in-a-china-shop mentality as a tackler, bulldozing through would-be blockers on his way to the ball with excellent take-on strength and length, as well as proper knee bend and pad level. Good key and diagnosis skills, including in coverage. Loves to intimidate would-be receivers, rushing up on screens and shallow crossing routes in the hopes that the quarterback will hang them out to dry with a lazy pass and provide him a clean shot.

**WEAKNESSES:** While quite fast for a man of his size, Lamar does not possess true sideline-to-sideline speed to consistently beat backs to the edge, potentially limiting his schematic fits. He takes sharp angles to the ball, but he's quickly forced to adjust them against nifty ball-carriers as he attempts to close. Lacks ideal stop-start quickness, losing ground quickly when forced to throttle down to run around traffic. Catches a lot of blocks because he's so broad, though he does show good balance and momentum to run through their grasp.

**Grade: 7.7**

### 5. TE'VON CONEY, Notre Dame

6-1, 240 40 time: 4.70 3rd-4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Coney, after leading the Irish in tackles in each of the past two seasons and earning an invitation to the prestigious Senior Bowl, is one of the most celebrated inside linebackers in the 2019 draft. While alert and quick enough to corral in a phone booth, Coney lacks elite speed, requiring a big, physical defensive line to keep blockers off him if he is to duplicate his collegiate success in the NFL.

**STRENGTHS:** Compact, surprisingly powerful frame. Uses his short stature to his advantage, routinely winning with pad level by sprawling at the point of attack to anchor before slipping off blockers for the drag-down tackle. Reliable diagnostic skills, accurately reading the action and efficiently working his way to the ball. Bounces like a pinball off would-be blockers, showing quick hands, knee bend and balance through contact to anchor and slither through the sea of behemoths near the line of scrimmage. Technically-sound wrap tackler, bringing his hips and running through ball-carriers. Shows good awareness of routes around him, drifting left or right to tighten throwing lanes.

**WEAKNESSES:** Lacks the sideline-to-sideline range most teams are looking for in a modern three-down linebacker, especially one with just average size. Willing to take on hard-charging blockers in the hole but lacks explosiveness in his meet and greet and makes too many tackles downfield, only after spinning off blocks and pursuing from behind. More aware than athletic in coverage, losing ground against nifty athletes on deeper routes.

**Grade: 7.4**

### 6. DAVID LONG JR., West Virginia*

5-11, 221 40 time: 4.75 3rd-4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Long is not for the faint of heart, losing some battles because of his below-average size and still others due to hazardous pursuit angles. He is a heat-seeking missile who craves contact, however, projecting, at least, as a special teams demon with a chance at bucking the odds to compete for real playing time if protected by a sizeable defensive line.

**STRENGTHS:** What Long may lack in stature, he makes up for with aggression and physicality, showing little regard of his own or others physical well-being. Races upfield to attack the run, eagerly taking on hard-charging blockers in the hole. Surprisingly effective in slipping by blockers in close quarters, winning with leverage by bending at the knees and keeping his pads low to root out opponents at the ground level. Trusts his eyes and takes direct lines to the ball, showing impressive closing speed and accuracy by zipping in from seemingly nowhere to cut down ball-carriers.

**WEAKNESSES:** Undersized frame that, frankly, looks better suited to safety than linebacker in the NFL. Lives and dies with his aggressive pursuit angles, leaving potential cut-back lanes to be exploited. Is more of a hitter than a tackler, relying upon collisions to stop ball-carriers in their tracks rather than wrapping securely with both arms. Below-average upper-body strength for the position with ball-carriers able to drag him or even occasionally break free of his arm tackles.

**Grade: 7.4**

### 7. T.J. EDWARDS, Wisconsin

6-1, 242 40 time: 4.79 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** There are bigger, flashier athletes, but teams that prioritize consistency will like Edwards, a four-year starter who earned All-Big Ten accolades after each season, including first-team honors as a junior and senior. He'll end up playing faster than he'll run for the stopwatch due to his instincts.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses a broad-shouldered, country-strong frame that helped him play in all 52 games of his college career. Experience shows with his key and diagnosis skills, often taking positive steps toward the ball before the play gets going, beating would-be blockers to the action. While possessing just fair straight-line speed, Edwards does show enough coordination in changing direction and route awareness to remain

## SPOTLIGHT

## Te'von Coney, Notre Dame

***What would you say to people that felt Notre Dame did not deserve to make the playoffs?*** I mean, going 12-0 is really hard in college football. That is something that every program dreams of, and playing the competition we did, it is really hard to go undefeated. We felt like we were one of the four teams that earned a chance to play for a national championship and we were thankful for the opportunity, as well.

***What would you say was your best game (and why) and what would you say was a game that you felt you could have performed better?*** Our last game against Clemson, I felt like I had a pretty good game. I had 16 tackles. Obviously, the outcome wasn't what I wanted, but I thought I played pretty well against an explosive offense and a pretty good running back (sophomore Travis Etienne). And then, earlier in the season against Vanderbilt, I feel like I wasn't as productive as I usually am. I feel like they did a really nice job of using a lot of misdirection — finding ways to get me going one way and then moving the ball the other way. So, hat's off to their offensive coordinator for coming up with a good scheme and I wasn't that productive that game.

***So, breaking it down even more then, did you have a favorite play or memory this season?*** My favorite play this year was against Stanford when I got an interception. I wanted to leave college with at least one interception, so having the opportunity to do that by closing out a win against Stanford by making my dream come true and coming up an interception at Notre Dame Stadium.

***What were you hoping to accomplish at the Senior Bowl?*** I wanted to show my teams my versatility. I wanted to show them that I could really cover. There were some really good running backs and tight ends there and I wanted to show them that I could I could run with them. I also wanted to show teams my leadership, show them that I can call the defense and get guys lined up. Those were my main goals, just to show them that I'm the complete package and that I can play all three downs.

PHOTO BY MATT CASHORE-USA TODAY SPORTS

on the field on passing downs (at least at Wisconsin), reading the eyes of quarterbacks and using his length and timing to break up 15 passes in his career. Very good hands for a linebacker, collecting at least three interceptions in each of the past three seasons with 10 overall in his career.

**WEAKNESSES:** He's a one-speed runner whose lack of suddenness could be exposed in the NFL. Isn't a bad athlete, actually showing fairly loose hips to change directions and good balance through contact, but he is too consistently beaten to the edge and downfield. Lacks an overall explosive element to his game. Almost too assignment-sound, appearing robotic, at times, with his willingness to follow his key one way while the ball goes by him the other.

**Grade: 7.0**

### 8. BOBBY OKEREKE, Stanford

6-3, 234 40 time: 4.70 5th-6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Though a three-year starter and two-time honorable mention All-Pac-12 pick, Okereke isn't well known outside of the west. Long-levered and twitchy (but a bit undisciplined), Okereke isn't your traditional Stanford front seven defender, but there is reason to believe that his best football might still lie ahead of him.

**STRENGTHS:** Unusual build for an inside linebacker, sporting a lanky, high-cut frame that belies a physical, no-nonsense playing style. Shows zero hesitation in taking on fullbacks in the hole, proving considerably stouter than his leggy frame suggests, dropping his hips and pads to effectively anchor. Delivers a jolt to would-be blockers, using his exceptionally long arms and powerful hands to stack and shed. Coordinated athlete showing balance and agility shuffling and sliding off blocks to pursue laterally or when turning to drop in coverage. Shows the athleticism to remain on the field on passing downs.

**WEAKNESSES:** Just average instincts, too often getting sucked up in play-action or blindly rushing upfield, only to watch the back escape on the draw. Lacks ideal body armor for an inside linebacker with relatively narrow shoulders and hips that could limit his ability to add and maintain much more weight. Has long arms to trip up ball-carriers but shows just average strength for the drag-down tackle, too often getting dragged for additional yardage.

**Grade: 6.8**

### 9. KHALIL HODGE, Buffalo

6-0, 235 40 time: 4.75 6th-7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Hodge might lack name recognition and elite size, but his instincts and athleticism are obvious on tape. After making 419 stops in three seasons at Buffalo, he has the look of an immediate special teams demon, with at least rotational possibilities at linebacker once he acclimates to the greater speed of the NFL.

**STRENGTHS:** Perhaps an inch or two shorter than ideal but possesses a legitimate NFL frame. Easy athleticism, including light feet, the ability to change direction and accelerate quickly. Good lateral agility to string runs out wide. Keeps his eyes locked on the ball, spinning away from would-be blockers and taking direct angles to the action. Sneaky blitzer, shows good timing to split gaps, as well as clean swim and spin moves to slip by blockers. Good quickness to close, generating surprising power to knock back ball-carriers. Excellent effort in downfield pursuit, showing vision and speed to get back into the play.

## 3 TO WATCH

### SLEEPER

**Jahlani Tavai, Hawaii**
Tavai comes with a laundry list of red flags to consider, but his play has led to droves of scouts leaving the mainland to evaluate him — which is saying something given that no Hawaii defenders have been drafted since 2012.

### COULD DISAPPOINT

**Cameron Smith, USC**
A freshman sensation for the Trojans, Smith has grown bigger and slower since, lacking the speed to handle sideline-to-sideline and coverage duties against today's speedy backs.

### SMALL SCHOOL STUD

**Khalil Hodge, Buffalo**
Hodge is not the same caliber of edge rusher as the Khalil (Mack) who preceded him at Buffalo, but he did lead the nation in tackles over the past three seasons, averaging about 140 a year.

**WEAKNESSES:** Undersized and likely limited to a traditional 4-3 alignment in which he's protected by a stout front. A run-and-chase linebacker, he's at his best avoiding blocks. While not lacking for confidence or physicality, Hodge can get overwhelmed by the sheer size of blockers, at times getting pinned inside. Marginal level of competition.

**Grade: 6.0**

### 10. JAHLANI TAVAI, Hawaii

6-3, 245 40 time: 4.75 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Hawaii isn't well known for producing quality NFL draft picks, especially on the defensive side of the ball, but Tavai looks like an exception. A four-year starter (391 tackles, 41 for loss, 17.5 sacks) with legitimate NFL size, athleticism and production, he's likely to hear his name called on Day 3, making him the first Rainbow Warriors defender to be drafted since the St. Louis Rams took a 7th-round flyer on linebacker Aaron Brown in 2012.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses a legitimate NFL frame. Quick to read run, showing good key and diagnosis skills to step up and take on hard-charging blockers in the hole. Extends his arms to keep blockers away from his frame, showing good length and strength to stay clean on his way to the ball. Good flexibility to dip under the reach of would-be blockers and is surprisingly fluid in scraping the corner. Athletic bloodlines, as two older brothers also played D-I football, including J.R. Tavai, formerly from USC and the Tennessee Titans.

**WEAKNESSES:** Tavai shows just fair speed overall, lacking ideal suddenness to close. More of a drag down 'rassler than a true striker, lacking the intimidation factor as a hitter that his size might suggest. Comes with character red flags that require investigating. Along with Hawaii teammate Kaiwi Chung, Tavai was arrested and charged with assault following an incident at a Honolulu nightclub.

**Grade: 5.9**

### 11. DESHAUN DAVIS, Auburn

5-11, 245 40 time: 4.75 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Davis is a battler, but short and slow is rarely a recipe for success in the NFL, especially given today's up-tempo passing attacks. Davis has a chance to get drafted late on Day 3 as his effort and physicality will make it tough on some coaching staff to ignore. He might even draw some looks at fullback.

**STRENGTHS:** While shorter than preferred, Davis is far from small, boasting a power-packed frame. Doesn't back down from a fight, proving to be very stout at the point of attack by incorporating excellent knee bend and pad level to anchor against would-be blockers out-weighing him by 50 or more pounds. A legitimate thumper as a tackler, uncoiling into ball-carriers to create violent collisions.

**WEAKNESSES:** Slow, even among inside linebackers. Looks like he's running through sand when pursuing to the edge, often being forced to adjust and re-adjust his angle to avoid being left in the dust. Shorter than ideal and occasionally loses sight of the ball as a result. Looks lost in coverage. Lacks feel for routes developing around him, turning his back to the quarterback to faceguard potential receivers.

**Grade: 5.8**

### 12. OTARO ALAKA, Texas A&M

6-2, 240 40 time: 4.78 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Alaka looks straight out of central casting with his imposing frame and steady production as a three-year starter in the SEC. A lack of ideal speed will push Alaka into Day 3 of the draft, but a team looking for a traditional run-stuffing MIKE will appreciate his readiness.

**STRENGTHS:** Shows good initial quickness, especially coming downhill in run support. Eager to crash the line of scrimmage and willingly takes on blockers, showing strength and balance to stand them up in the hole. Good core flexibility, allowing him to scrape corners and adjust quickly in close quarters to latch onto runners. Very good strength for the drag-down tackle. Shows some savvy in coverage, getting proper depth in his drops.

**WEAKNESSES:** While possessing good initial quickness, Alaka tops out quickly, showing just fair speed overall. Too often backs are able to beat him to the edge and he is forced to take conservative angles in pursuit downfield to compensate for his average wheels. Requires a thorough medical screening after suffering multiple arm injuries.

**Grade: 5.6**

## WORTH WATCHING

**Ben Burr-Kirven, Washington (6-0, 221)**
Size has always been the knock against him, but he was Pac-12 Defensive POY.

**Ryan Connelly, Wisconsin (6-2, 237)**
A former walk-on who finished with 29 career tackles for loss.

**Joe Giles-Harris, Duke (6-1, 240)***
Does a nice job diagnosing the play and covers a lot of ground sideline-to-sideline.

**Kendall Joseph, Clemson (5-11, 235)**
Lacks prototypical size, but has versatility, instincts and lots of positive experience.

**Cameron Smith, USC (6-1, 250)**
Is there still room for a classic run-stuffer in the NFL?

*For further analysis of the 2019 inside linebackers, visit www.nfldraftscout.com.*

# Outside Linebackers

**OVERVIEW** With offenses becoming more multiple by the hour, the days of teams exclusively running standard 4-3 and 3-4 defensive alignments are over.

This evolution of the game has lessened the need for the traditional glass-eating, run-stuffing inside linebackers that used to personify the game of football and greatly enhanced the value of those edge defenders who can impact the passing game — whether by rushing the quarterback, blanketing potential pass-catchers in coverage or, ideally, both.

Fortunately, the 2019 NFL Draft offers an above-average class at the position, with a Baskins Robbins-like variety of fits and flavors to suit every taste.

Teams willing to spend money to make money might just want to keep it simple and invest a top 5 (or higher) pick on Kentucky's Josh Allen, a twitchy and prototypically-built 6-4, 258-pound edge rusher who dominated the SEC to the tune of 21.5 tackles for loss and 17 sacks in 2018. Others wonder if the similarly-built (but less-polished) Brian Burns from Florida State or Oregon's Justin Hollins might not offer better value at various later stages.

Those on the lookout for more of a seek-and-destroy coverage linebacker have lots of options spread throughout the country to consider. Florida's speedy junior Vosean Joseph is a heat-seeking missile from a program well-known for producing top NFL prospects, but don't close your eyes to sleepers like New Mexico State's Terrill Hanks or BYU's Sione Takitaki, who drew rave reviews at prominent all-star games.

**2019 CLASS GRADE**
**B**

PHOTO BY JASEN VINLOVE-USA TODAY SPORTS

*Denotes underclassman

**1. JOSH ALLEN, Kentucky**
6-5, 258 40 time: 4.59 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The reigning Nagurski, Bednarik and Lott IMPACT award winner as the nation's top defender, Allen is more decorated than a wedding cake, projecting as an NFL starter on Day 1. Given his ideal blend of size, athleticism and production against elite competition, he doesn't just have a high ceiling, he ranks as one of the "safer" prospects in the 2019 draft class.

Perhaps no player better exemplified the value in returning for a senior season than Allen, as he dominated with 17 sacks, 21.5 tackles for loss, five forced fumbles and even added four pass breakups. Skeptics will point out that he was surrounded by a great deal of talent at Kentucky (especially in its secondary), aiding his cause as a pass rusher, but his high-revving motor drowns out most of that kind of talk, replaced by speculation that he's not out of place as a contender for the No. 1 pick.

**STRENGTHS:** Broad-shouldered, long-armed, muscle-bound and loose-hipped, Allen checks all of the boxes of a modern edge rusher. Crafty and creative out of the two-point stance, varying his approach with speed, hesitation and an assortment of hand techniques, showing excellent coordination with his feet. Boasts the suddenness off the snap to cross the face of tackles with a simple speed rush and complements it with an explosive counter back inside, balance in his spin moves and active, powerful hands. Good core flexibility to dip under the reach of tackles and scrape the corner.

Excellent hand-eye coordination to poke the ball free from unsuspecting quarterbacks even while being blocked, taking full advantage of his long arms. Has steadily improved as a run defender, showing pad level, balance and core strength to hold up at the point of attack. Developing strength to stack and shed blocks at the point of attack, as well as the balance to string runs out wide or pursue downfield.

For a big man best known for rushing the passer, Allen shows intriguing coordination and acceleration turning downfield, displaying impressive agility and awareness of the ball in flight (see, Texas A&M,

## FLASHBACK

**It takes at least three years to determine the success or failure of draft picks**

*Here's a snapshot of recent hits and misses*

### Diamond in the Rough

**Kyler Fackrell, Packers (Third round, 2016)**
Despite starting just seven games for the Packers (but playing in all 16), Fackrell emerged as Green Bay's best pass rusher in a breakout third NFL season, recording 10.5 sacks after combining for just five in his previous two seasons since being drafted 88th overall out of Utah State.

### Swing and Miss

**Leonard Floyd, Bears (First round, 2016)**
It isn't that Floyd is a bad player — he registered a career-high 47 tackles while starting all 16 games for the Bears last season — but he was drafted ninth overall to supply a pass rush and has been just marginally productive in that category, with his sack numbers dropping in each of his three NFL seasons.

### Breakout Player

**Haason Reddick, Cardinals (First round, 2016)**
Reddick jumped from 36 tackles to 80 in an encouraging second NFL season. New Arizona head coach Kliff Kingsbury's up-tempo offense will encourage rivals to counter by running the ball, setting up Reddick to post even bigger numbers in 2019.

## PROTOTYPE

**✔ Pass Rush**

**Josh Allen, Kentucky**
It isn't just that Allen recorded a staggering 31 sacks over the past three seasons against elite competition, it's that his burst, bend and length mean he's likely to produce similar numbers in the NFL.

**✔ Run Defense**

**Vosean Joseph, Florida**
Given the myriad of different sizes and shapes of runners in today's NFL, speed, intensity and competitiveness are more required than ever from linebackers. Few check those boxes more emphatically in this class than Joseph.

**✔ Pass Defense**

**Chase Hansen, Utah**
A former safety with the instincts and movement skills to excel in coverage in the pass-happy Pac-12, Hansen's ability to cover could earn him top 100 consideration.

**✔ Explosion**

**Jachai Polite, Florida**
In terms of explosion, Polite blows past would-be blockers with his upfield burst and underrated power, tying Florida's single-season record with six forced fumbles in 2018.

**✔ Strength**

**Germaine Pratt, NC State**
The muscle-bound Pratt should be one of the first players off the bus for his future NFL team. His weight-room strength will capture attention in pre-draft workouts, and his power translates onto the field, as well.

**✔ Tackling**

**Justin Hollins, Oregon**
Hollins' huge wingspan (79 5/8 inches) give him a massive tackle radius, and the former defensive end showed intriguing agility and speed when asked to play off the ball during practices at the East-West Shrine Game.

**✔ Intangibles**

**Drue Tranquill, Notre Dame**
An All-American on and off the field, Tranquill is a coach's dream. The former safety's hard work in the weight room helped him grow into a star linebacker and legitimate top 100 pick.

Central Michigan games). Physical, reliable tackler. Uses his crane-like length to track down ball-carriers out of the grasp of most, ripping ball-carriers to the ground.

**WEAKNESSES:** Picking nits, Allen is more finesse than physical despite his imposing frame. At times, he is too reliant upon his length and athleticism to avoid blockers, showing the power to stack and shed but often giving up extra yardage to do so. Fails to recognize cut blocks coming, too often being chopped to the ground. Though he has no known injuries of note to date, Allen possesses a relatively long-limbed frame that could leave him vulnerable.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Clay Matthews, Green Bay Packers — Prior to becoming a Pro Bowl edge rusher for the Packers, Matthews (6-3, 251) also enjoyed a scorching rise up draft boards as a senior, boosting his cause significantly with an impressive showing in Mobile. Allen won't have to wait until 26th overall (where the Packers nabbed Matthews), looking to join Tim Couch (No. 1 overall in 1999) and Dewayne Robertson (No. 4 in 2003) as the only Kentucky players to earn top five picks in the draft in the past 40 years.

**Grade: 8.4**

### 2. JACHAI POLITE, Florida*

6-2, 242 40 time: 4.62 1st-2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Polite struggled with his weight early on at Florida before committing to his craft as a junior and enjoying a breakout campaign as one of the nation's most feared edge rushers. Coaches saw Polite's potential immediately, plugging in the then-270 pounder as a three-technique defensive tackle, on occasion, as a true freshman. He teased coaches with his upside for his first two seasons ... and then was a changed man in 2018, showing greater discipline in taking care of his body.

He reportedly eliminated sweets from his diet and dropped 25 pounds, starting all 13 games as a stand-up edge rusher. Polite exploded for 45 tackles, including 19.5 tackles for loss and 11 sacks. Polite was decidedly rude when it came to taking the ball away from opponents, leading the nation and tying the Florida season record with six forced fumbles, including one in the Gators' Peach Bowl win over Michigan.

While he lacks ideal size at OLB, and therefore requires a real plan as to what an NFL team wants to do with him, Polite's suddenness and competitiveness suggest that his knack for creating big plays will continue in the NFL, warranting a potential first-round selection.

**STRENGTHS:** Energizer bunny off the edge and in pursuit. While shorter than ideal, Polite possesses a compact, powerful frame, making him tougher to move at the point of attack than he appears. A twitched-up edge rusher who times the snap beautifully, Polite is often so fast off the ball that tackles are left scrambling to recover while playing on their heels, leaving them off-balance and unable to handle his counters and even bull rushes. At 242 pounds, Polite shows easy movement skills, operating in forward, reverse and laterally.

Wasn't often used in coverage but shows the change of direction and awareness to handle these duties, peeling off to cover backs and working angles to keep himself squarely between the quarterback and intended receiver. He's elusive in tight quarters, showing quickness, balance and spatial awareness to "get skinny" through gaps.

His short, choppy steps keep him balanced through contact and help him accelerate smoothly, topping out with above-average straight-line speed for edge rushers and an uncommon late burst. Terrific timing and hand-eye coordination to slap at the ball as he's being blocked. Physical, wrap-up tackler who never backs down from competition. Truly appears to have turned the corner as a leader, earning rave reviews for his commitment to maximizing his potential.

**WEAKNESSES:** Starred as an edge rusher for Florida but is significantly undersized to maintain this role at the next level. Stronger than he looks

PHOTO BY KIM KLEMENT-USA TODAY SPORTS

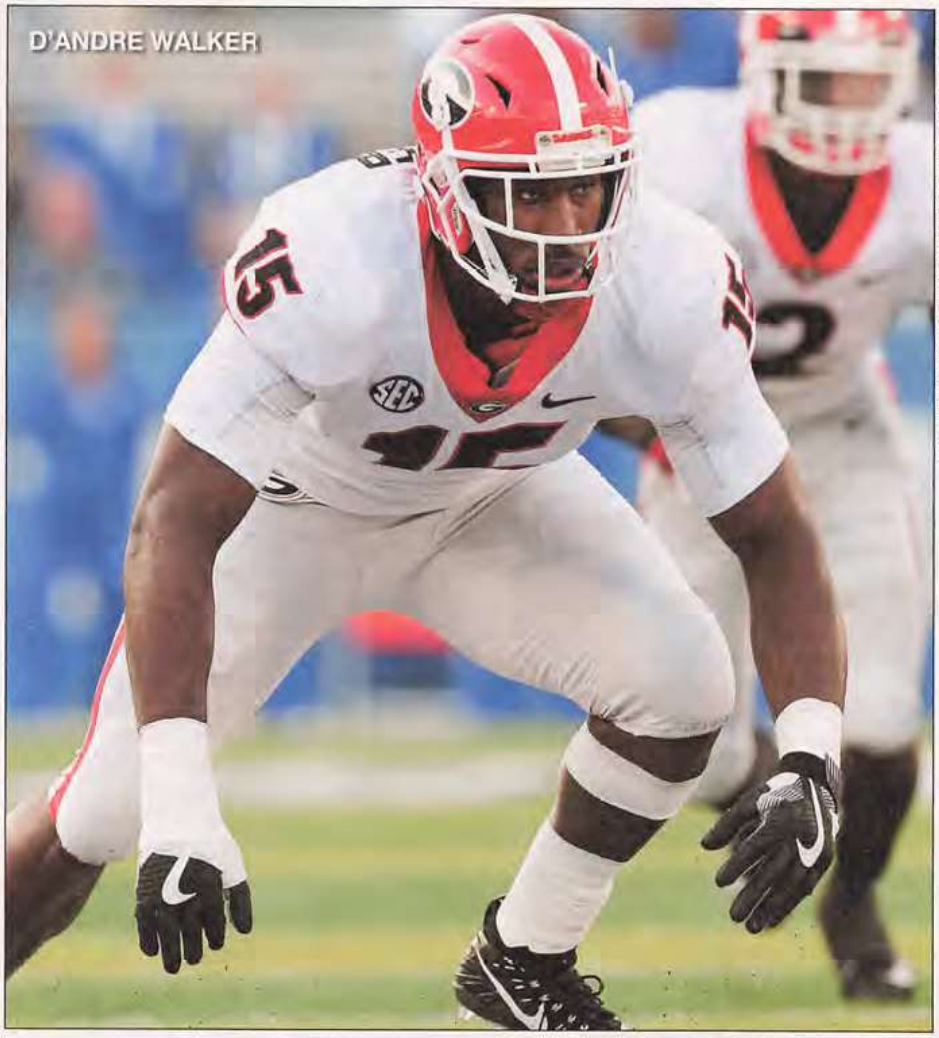


PHOTO BY ARIEL HALL ALLIANCE/SPORTSWIRE/BOON SPORTSWIRE VIA AP IMAGES

but is still too often overwhelmed at the point of attack when blockers latch on. Makes a lot of his plays on backside pursuit, including downfield. Missed the final four games of the 2017 season with a shoulder injury that will require a closer look by NFL doctors. Opted to declare after just one productive season, leaving some to wonder if he will maintain his intensity after landing a lucrative NFL contract.

**COMPARES TO:** Robert Mathis, Indianapolis Colts (retired) — The 6-2, 245-pound Mathis had to carve out his NFL career as a fifth-round pick out of Alabama A&M, but he flourished once he was allowed to simply pin his ears back and attack, earning six trips to the Pro Bowl over his 13 NFL seasons (all in Indianapolis) with 123 career sacks and 52 forced fumbles.

**Grade: 8.1**

## 3. BRIAN BURNS, Florida State*

6-4, 235 40 time: 4.64 1st-2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The need to affect quarterbacks is so critical in today's up-tempo NFL that teams are increasingly willing to sacrifice size for speed. That's music to the ears of the lanky Burns, who left scorch marks on would-be blockers (and their quarterbacks) in three seasons with the Seminoles, recording 24 sacks and seven forced fumbles in 33 career games.

The former five-star recruit immediately lived up to his billing, leading the nation's first-year players with 9.5 sacks — the most from an FSU freshman since 1977. After earning consensus Freshman All-American honors, opponents knew exactly where Burns was in 2017, and his production slipped, at least in terms of flashy sacks (4.5), although he still posted 13.5 tackles for loss (13.5) while breaking up four passes and forcing three fumbles.

Burns would go on to post 52 tackles — 15.5 for loss, 10 sacks — with another three forced fumbles in 2018 despite the Seminoles (5-7) failing to qualify for a bowl game. At this point in his career, Burns is a bit of a one-trick pony as a speed rusher off the edge, projecting best as a stand-up linebacker. That specialty — speed off the edge — is among the most valued traits in football.

**STRENGTHS:** Passes the eye test of a modern edge rusher with broad shoulders, long arms and a V-shaped torso that appears just as suited to playing small forward in the NBA. Fires off the ball to instantly threaten the corner, whether starting from a two- or three-point stance. Look for his galloping strides that allow him to quickly get to top speed, showing the smooth acceleration that should result in impressive 40-yard dash times.

He possesses a sudden swim move with excellent coordination with his lower body to cleanly climb upfield. Effectively bends his knees to dip under the reach of tackles. Good lateral agility for the dekestep counter back to the inside. Surprisingly stout at the point of attack, using his length and core strength to lock out much-larger blockers and often create a stalemate.

Converts speed to power off the edge, generating explosive closing ability. Huge wingspan to cast a wide net as a tackler, tripping up ball-carriers or knocking the ball free from quarterbacks seemingly out of his grasp (Miami). Blocked two kicks in 2017. No known injuries to date.

**WEAKNESSES:** A bit stiff in his midsection, showing less-than-ideal flexibility to scrape the edge and efficiently run the arc. High-cut and top-heavy with somewhat of a beach body with greater muscular development in his upper body than lower. Average balance among edge rushers, using a flailing off-hand to steer his course and throttling down to turn sharp laterally. Lacks meaningful experience in coverage with just average change of direction (among traditional outside linebackers), so he will require further development in this area.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Leonard Floyd, Chicago Bears — Given their similar frames, games and level of competition out of college, the gangly (but surprisingly strong) 6-4, 251-pound Floyd is an easy comparison for Burns. But the team that invests in Burns will be hoping that his speed off the edge translates into more big plays than those made by Floyd, the former Georgia standout selected ninth overall in 2016. He has just eight sacks over the past two NFL seasons after recording seven as a rookie.

**Grade: 8.0**

## 4. VOSEAN JOSEPH, Florida*

6-1, 226 40 time: 4.58 2nd-3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Given all the myriad of multi-purpose weapons powering today's up-tempo offenses, teams are left searching for defenders with the combination of speed, agility and physicality to match up. Joseph checks those boxes and many others.

The third-year junior declared early for the draft after leading the Gators with 93 tackles, including nine for loss (four sacks) and five passes broken up. Joseph earned Walter Camp Defensive Player of the Week honors in a win over then-No. 5 LSU, registering a career-high 14 tackles, including 3.5 for loss.

Joseph is a young mustang who needs to be reined in a bit, but the team that gambles on his athletic upside could be handsomely rewarded.

**STRENGTHS:** Tight-skinned, coordinated athlete with the instincts, agility and speed to beat backs to the sideline. Wonderful spatial awareness and balance to duck, dip and slip by would-be blockers, showing vision, patience and athleticism to dance through the trash, almost like a running back. Varies his approach toward ball-carriers, alternately speeding up or throttling down, disrupting the timing of blockers tasked with tracking him down.

Very good lateral agility to avoid blockers and shows quick, active and surprisingly powerful hands to punch and disengage quickly when opponents do find him before the ball arrives. High-low hitter who brings his hips as a tackler, generating impressive short-area explosiveness. Long arms and good hand-eye coordination to trip up ball-carriers, showing the potential to develop into a fine open-field tackler.

Still reliant on his initial burst and speed when rushing the passer but shows good core flexibility to run the arc and change direction efficiently. Developing instincts in coverage but shows promise in this area due to his awareness and athleticism.

**WEAKNESSES:** Relatively narrow shoulders and hips, lacking ideal body armor for linebacker. More of a striker than a technically-refined tackler. Far too many missed tackles on tape (LSU, Georgia) where Joseph simply launches himself at ball-carriers but fails to wrap up. Appears to have an accurate strike zone but simply needs to get stronger and wrap tighter.

Highly aggressive in run support, leaving him flat-footed and late reacting to play-action. Developing awareness of routes around him, allowing himself to be too easily influenced by savvy quarterbacks. Allows his emotions to get the better of him, at times, drawing silly penalties for unsportsmanlike conduct (Vanderbilt, Florida), getting himself kicked out against the Commodores for his part in what turned out to be an ugly brawl between members of both teams.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Mark Barron, Los Angeles Rams — Now listed at 6-2, 230 pounds, Barron has grown from serving as a heat-seeking missile at safety for the Crimson Tide to a full-fledged linebacker in the NFL. Like Barron, Joseph may need some time to get settled into the NFL, but his upside warrants gambling.

**Grade: 7.8**

### 5. D'ANDRE WALKER, Georgia

6-3, 245 40 time: 4.70 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Walker may lack the name recognition of some of his edge rushing peers after biding his time behind an NFL pipeline in Athens, but scouts can check a lot of boxes with his length, strength and speed. His ability to rush the passer is what initially draws scouts' interest, but he has underrated effectiveness in other areas.

Perhaps best of all, he appears to be an ascending player who can still travel a long way on his football learning curve. That perceived upside — as well as his versatility — will draw plenty of interest with Walker likely off the board on Day 2.

**STRENGTHS:** Looks and plays bigger than his listed height, perhaps due to his very broad shoulders and long arms and thick lower half. While perhaps not truly explosive off the snap, Walker shows above-average initial burst to get a rolling start off the snap, accelerating smoothly with long strides and challenging tackles with his speed. He is a flexible, coordinated athlete, showing the ability to dip under the reach of tackles, as well as scrape the corner.

His country-strong frame is made more powerful with excellent pad level, earning high marks for toughness with his willingness to get low and root out oncoming lead blockers in the hole. Limited reps in coverage but looked comfortable turning and running covering back on wheel route vs. Tennessee.

Effective tackler in the open field, showing the composure to break down and lassoing ball-carriers with his long arms. Passionate in pursuit and looks to make a statement as a hitter when he can, alternately lowering a shoulder to deliver a boom or throwing ball-carriers to the ground emphatically.

**WEAKNESSES:** His production might have been influenced by play-calling as Georgia schemed and shifted Walker all over to create positive matchups, resulting in him rarely being forced to take on double-teams. Plays bigger than his listed size but possesses just average bulk, at least at this time, for edge-rush duties. Needs to show greater awareness of passing lanes, failing to get his long arms into the air consistently enough to cloud the quarterback's vision. Has just four passes defended over his career, albeit three of them coming in 2018.

**Grade: 7.5**

PHOTO BY AP PHOTO/PAUL SANCYA

### 6. GERMAINE PRATT, NC State

6-2, 240 40 time: 4.68 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** NFL teams are always in search of an athlete whose commitment to nutrition and the weight room helped them grow out of one position and morph into a bigger, faster player. That is precisely the case with Pratt, a former safety with the Wolfpack (and high school receiver) who bulked up over five seasons to emerge as one of the ACC's top linebackers in 2018, leading the conference in tackles at the conclusion of the regular season (104), despite missing the final two games of the year due to a shoulder injury.

What makes Pratt's ascent so interesting is that he did not emerge as a full-time starter until his senior campaign, rotating with two seniors in 2017 and still finishing fourth on the team in tackles (69, including five for loss) and showing a knack for producing big plays in big games, intercepting passes to seal wins over Louisville (and its Heisman Trophy-winning, first-round quarterback Lamar Jackson) and state rival North Carolina, as well as recovering a fumble in the end zone against Notre Dame.

Pratt looks the part of a future Pro Bowl inside linebacker, but his play leaves you wanting more consistency, which may keep him outside. The hope is that with another year or two, he can iron out some of the wrinkles and find a home.

**STRENGTHS:** Sports a physically-imposing, rocked-up frame that shows his dedication to the weight room. Carries his weight well, complementing his broad upper body with a stout lower half. Intriguing athleticism, including relatively loose hips and a smooth transition out of his breaks for the position. Accelerates smoothly, showing enough speed and agility to handle coverage duties against backs and tight ends.

Improved punch to disengage from blockers, as

well as good agility and balance to slip away. Reliable face-up tackler who wraps his arms around ball-carriers securely, not relying upon his knockdown power. Showed his resiliency by earning the Ken McNeill Iron Wolf Award for his dedication as a redshirt junior (2017), returning from season-ending shoulder surgery the year before. Voted a team captain in 2018.

**WEAKNESSES:** Not yet the sum of his parts. Does not play as physically as his size suggests, needing to show more urgency in taking on and shedding blockers in the hole. A quality athlete for the position but does not show the extra gear one might assume given that he formerly played safety. Does not play as fast as he may run in workouts, showing just average key and diagnosis skills at this time.

Shows a limited repertoire as a rusher, relying on his agility and speed rather than any real technique to defeat would-be blockers. Does come with some medical red flags, missing the final two games of the 2018 season, as well as the entire 2016 season following shoulder surgery.

**Grade: 7.3**

### 7. DRUE TRANQUILL, Notre Dame

6-1, 235 40 time: 4.64 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** While lacking preferred size, the route-savvy and agility that earned him playing time at safety early in his career is clear in Tranquill's game, making him well suited to handle the coverage duties of today's weakside linebackers. Tranquill would have been thought too small to play linebacker 10 years ago, but he is hoping to join the party as a modern moveable chess piece.

**STRENGTHS:** Light on his feet and relatively loose-hipped among linebackers, smoothly re-directing and accelerating with above-average speed for the position. Good spatial awareness and balance to sift through traffic and when running with tight ends or backs downfield in coverage. Plays with patience, letting the action come to him. Reads his keys and trusts his eyes, often getting an early break on the ball and lining up some wicked direct hits on screens and undercutting routes (Georgia, 2017). Passionate in pursuit, taking aggressive angles.

Shows poise with the ball in the air with good (not great) ball-skills, turning three of his 11 career passes defensed into interceptions. Has off-the-charts intangibles. Two-time team captain. Senior CLASS award nominee. Graduated in May 2018 with mechanical engineering degree. Married.

**WEAKNESSES:** Below-average height among NFL linebackers with a nearly maxed-out frame. Willing to take on hard-charging blockers in the hole but has to fight for a stalemate, lacking the sand in his pants to anchor effectively or the explosive hands to disengage once opponents latch on. Occasionally gets lazy in his technique, fending off would-be blockers by leaning into them with his forearms (rather than engaging with his hands), leaving himself off-balance. While proving durable since, Tranquill does have a major injury in his past, suffering a torn ACL against Louisville on Nov. 22, 2014.

**Grade: 7.3**

### 8. SUTTON SMITH, Northern Illinois*

6-0, 237 40 time: 4.75 3rd-4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** By now, you've heard that the 2019 draft is absolutely loaded with defensive linemen. What you may not realize is that one of the most productive was Smith, a pint-sized pass rusher who recorded a staggering 29 sacks and 56.5 tackles for loss over the past two seasons at Northern Illinois, prompting him to declare early and (because he had already graduated), earning him a trip to the prestigious Senior Bowl, where he had a chance to prove he's just as dynamic as an off-ball linebacker.

A true-to-life version of the character Dash in the animated film series, The Incredibles, Smith is a dynamo of speed, competitiveness and underrated power. If he can prove instinctive and agile enough to handle coverage duties in pre-draft workouts, Smith could prove one of the more fascinating stories of the 2019 draft.

Don't discount him even if he struggles with this position change (maybe even middle linebacker?), as little guys are often the most difficult ones for big guys to block, making Smith an intriguing pass rush specialist and special teams demon who might just steal a roster spot.

**STRENGTHS:** Short but not small with broad shoulders and a rocked-up upper body. Lightning quick off the snap, zipping by would-be blockers freely on occasion and showing good lateral agility to elude in tight quarters. Takes full advantage of his lower-pad level, consistently over-powering much larger men by getting under their pads and uprooting them with excellent leg drive. Also uses his hands well to overcome lack of size.

While generally playing with a frenetic style that makes him difficult for would-be blockers to line up, Smith breaks down well as a tackler in the open field, hitting what he sees and bringing his hips to spark some big collisions. Has very good upper-body strength and isn't against showing it off, lifting ball-carriers and tossing them to the turf (Utah). Fully energized when it comes to pursuit, racing all over the field to get involved. Quick to get back up if knocked down, showing a Rudy Ruettiger-style that will endear him to coaches and fans.

PHOTO BY AP PHOTO/RICK SCUTERI, FILE

**WEAKNESSES:** Significantly shorter than preferred for playing along the line of scrimmage, projecting at best as a pass rush specialist if remaining there. Very limited experience playing off the ball at the college level, which essentially made the week of practice at the Senior Bowl his audition for handling a position switch — and he had mixed results. More pesky than punishing as a defender, running circles around would-be blockers at times, but getting tossed aside or to the turf on plenty of plays, as well. Lack of length shows up as tackler, as well, offering a relatively tiny tackle radius in comparison to most edge rushers.

**Grade: 7.1**

### 9. CHASE HANSEN, Utah

6-3, 230 40 time: 4.65 3rd-4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** If drawing up the perfect linebacker to match up against today's versatile skill-position players in the NFL, one could do worse than to use Utah's Chase Hansen as the prototype.

Originally recruited to play quarterback before making the switch, first to safety and then linebacker, Hansen offers rare perspective for the position, helping him in coverage. It was near the line of scrimmage, however, that Hansen boosted his draft stock most in 2018, however, recording a career-high 114 tackles, including a Pac-12 leading 22 tackles for loss in his first season at rover, a hybrid safety-linebacker role.

In a classic case of better late than never, Hansen's breakout campaign came as a senior — a full seven years after initially stepping onto campus at Utah. He attempted one pass and rushed four times (for 31 yards) while playing quarterback in 2015 before making the switch to safety in 2016, where he looked like a future NFL draft pick by registering 90 tackles, including 7.5 for loss and setting career-highs in recovered fumbles (four), forced fumbles (three) and interceptions (three) while chipping in

nine passes defensed and scoring the first of two career touchdowns.

Hansen is a bit of a throwback to a prior generation, showing off the size, athleticism and all-around football instincts. Hansen's stellar production in his one season at linebacker is certainly intriguing but his advanced age likely limits his stock to Day 3.

**STRENGTHS:** Lanky build for the position with broad shoulders and a well-distributed musculature. Excellent key and diagnosis skills. Trusts his eyes and attacks the ball, showing burst and aggression to slice gaps in the running game. A former safety, his experience shows in coverage, showing above-average route recognition and agility to handle man-to-man and zone duties against tight ends and backs.

Reads the eyes of quarterbacks and gets an early jump on throws, showing very good hand-eye coordination and soft mitts to break up 16 passes over his career with six interceptions. Doesn't look out of place near the line of scrimmage, showing enough pop in his hands and toughness to take on and shed would-be tacklers in the hole. Effective drag-down tackler who wraps his arms securely, rarely allowing ball-carriers to slip out of his grasp.

**WEAKNESSES:** Isn't the tone-setter most teams are looking for in at linebacker, showing just average stopping power as a hitter and too often being dragged as a tackler for additional yardage. Can get lost in the mass of humanity at the line of scrimmage, needing to show greater hand technique to rip free from blockers and, occasionally, losing sight of the ball in traffic. Significantly older than most prospects, turning 26 before he'll ever suit up in an NFL game after redshirting (2012) and spending two years on an LDS mission (2013-14). Missed multiple games over his career due to various undisclosed injuries, including five in 2017 and the 2018 Holiday Bowl.

**Grade: 7.1**

### 10. TERRILL HANKS, New Mexico State

6-2, 235 40 time: 4.62 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** At this point, Hanks is a see-the-ball, get-the-ball athlete lacking in the finer subtleties of the linebacker position. He is a bit of a project, but the raw tools are there to warrant potential Day 2 consideration, with the expectation that Hanks should be able to compete for real playing time by his second season in the NFL.

**STRENGTHS:** Looks the part of an NFL outside linebacker with a prototypical broad-shouldered, long-limbed frame with good overall musculature. Balanced, coordinated athlete who changes direction and accelerates smoothly. Eases into his zone in pass coverage, showing a nice downhill burst to the ball on underneath routes, as well as enough agility to handle short man to man duties against backs and tight ends. Active and aggressive in run support, slicing past would-be blockers to attack the line of scrimmage. Physical, competitive tackler with legitimate stopping power. Good vision, effort and speed for pursuit.

**WEAKNESSES:** Plays with blinders, at times, focusing so much on his assignment that he loses sight of the ball. Can be a tick slow in processing the action with occasional false steps when his pre-snap diagnosis is incorrect. Bit of a bull in a china shop when taking on blockers, showing physicality but a sporadic strike zone and often resorting to eluding them. Aggressive tackler with a bad habit of leaving his feet when he has a runway, resulting in some big hits but also a few ugly whiffs (Minnesota). Raw on the blitz, showing rudimentary use of hands and limited plan as a rusher.

**Grade: 7.0**

### 11. BEN BANOGU, TCU

6-4, 245 40 time: 4.79 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** NFL scouts like to say that if a player is good enough, they'll find him, almost regardless of the competition. That may have been the case for Banogu — who began his college career at the University of Louisiana-Monroe — but there is no doubt that he received more exposure with Gary Patterson and TCU, where he transferred in 2016 and became the Horned Frogs' star pass rusher the past two seasons.

The Texas native redshirted his first season at ULM before earning a spot on the Sun Belt conference's All-Newcomer team in 2015. That success (as well as a request to move back to his native state) led to Banogu requesting a transfer. He sat out the 2016 season per NCAA guidelines before exploding for 49 tackles, 16.5 tackles for loss, 8.5 sacks and three forced fumbles for the Horned Frogs, earning the Big 12's Defensive Newcomer of the Year Award.

Despite conference opponents dedicating multiple blockers to slow him last season, Banogu put up similar numbers in 2018 and earned an invitation to the prestigious Senior Bowl. He comes with an intriguing blend of length and agility that can make him effective on twists as a looping rusher. He is a bit of a one-trick pony in this regard, however, lacking ideal explosiveness to threaten the edge consistently on his own, as well as the strength to hold up in the running game.

**STRENGTHS:** Looks the part of an NFL edge rusher. Smooth accelerator off the corner with intriguing core flexibility and lateral agility to "get skinny," dip under the reach of tackles or elude would-be blockers in tight quarters. Slithers through holes to find the ball-carrier, showing vision, balance and the length to lasso opponents, as well as good hand-eye coordination to knock the ball free (seven forced fumbles from 2016-18).

**WEAKNESSES:** Just average twitch for an edge defender, lacking the initial explosiveness to consistently threaten the corner as a traditional speed rusher. Poor pad level and a lack of core strength too often leave him overwhelmed at the point of

## SPOTLIGHT

### Justin Hollins, Oregon

*Take us back to the recruiting trail. What led a guy from Arlington, Texas, to choose Oregon?* Well, growing up when I started watching college football, Oregon really stood out to me as one of those dream schools that I wanted to go to. And, on top of that, I wanted to get away from home and be out on my own. I felt like it was the best opportunity offered to me coming out of high school.

*What is your favorite football memory at Oregon?* Wow, to limit them to just one is tough. Among them certainly I'd have to say beating Washington this year and getting the Ducks back on top of that rivalry. The first play of my career -- I was out on kickoff in the season-opener just two months after coming to Eugene -- and the crowd was just so loud and jumping, I'll never forget that. And then, my pick, honestly. You know, it isn't often that outside linebackers or defensive ends get opportunities with the ball, so getting that and scoring (against rival Oregon State), that is something I feel good about and will take with me the rest of my life.

*Your production at Oregon as an edge rusher speaks for itself but where you really turned some heads was in winning Defensive MVP at the East-West Shrine Game while playing a lot of off-ball linebacker. Tell us more about that experience.* Well, going to the East-West Shrine Game was definitely a great opportunity, representing the Oregon Ducks and playing against great competition. It was pretty fun. I got to get coached by some NFL coaches. I got a chance to play a different position. I wasn't that comfortable at first to be honest with you, but the more I played, the more comfortable I got. They played us in a 4-3 and I'm used to playing in an odd front, so playing outside linebacker in that scheme I had a chance to do some different things, like play more stacked behind the defensive linemen, play different gaps and run from sideline to sideline. Like I said, it was pretty fun.

*For all of the terrific football being played at that all-star game over the years, I know a lot of players leave with lasting memories of visiting children through the Shriner's Hospital, as well. What can you tell us about that experience?* I'm going to remember that for the rest of my life. Those kids look up to us but really, we look to them just as much because they are such an inspiration. To see how those kids respond to the challenges they are facing — their courage and how they keep smiling through it all — it really humbles you and makes you take a step back and really cherish what God has blessed you with.

PHOTO BY JOSH HOLMBERG/ICON SPORTSWIRE (ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA AP IMAGES)

attack in the running game, getting pushed downfield. Needs to incorporate more technique in his pass rush arsenal, showing limited coordination between his hands and feet. Lacks experience in coverage, looking unsure of himself in space. Needs to do a better job of affecting the quarterback when not able to rush, registering just three passes broken up (zero in 2018), showing limited awareness of throwing lanes.

**Grade: 7.0**

### 12. CHRISTIAN MILLER, Alabama

6-4, 244 40 time: 4.76 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Forced to bide his time at Alabama behind future NFL draft picks, Miller finally got his chance to shine in 2018, exploding for eight of his career 11 sacks. He is a long, linear athlete who rushes upfield with a similar one-cut downhill approach as many of the Tide's top running backs over the years, showing impressive speed and explosive power in a straight-line but lacking ideal balance and lateral agility.

**STRENGTHS:** Boast an imposing frame with broad shoulders and long arms. Fires off the ball, showing impressive hip snap for an edge rusher of his height to generate an explosive burst upfield. Generates impressive straight-line speed when he has a runway. Good length to keep tackles at bay, showing the strength to walk tackles deep into the pocket with an explosive initial punch to break free.

Stout at the point of attack in run support, showing strength and pad level to set an edge. Developing use of hands with a quick push/pull, cross chop and over-arm swim move among his go-to's as a rusher. He set forth a tremendous amount of effort getting stronger and more physical, bulking up 40 pounds during his time in Tuscaloosa, and has the frame to pack on some additional pounds if needed.

**WEAKNESSES:** High-cut and lacks ideal core flexibility, limiting his ability to change directions quickly. Vulnerable to cut blocks, showing just average awareness and agility to avoid them. Quits working his hands too early in the rep, resorting to playing patty cake with tackles. Underwent surgery and missed 10 games in 2017 for a torn bicep. One-year wonder who entered his senior season with just 22 career tackles and three sacks to his credit.

**Grade: 6.5**

### 13. JUSTIN HOLLINS, Oregon

6-5, 242 40 time: 4.65 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Hollins mostly saw time on special teams as a true freshman before redshirting during his second season on campus. Since then, he made steady improvement over his career, raising his number of tackles, tackles for loss, sacks and forced fumbles in each of the past three seasons, culminating with a 2018 campaign in which he registered 64 tackles, including 14.5 for loss and 6.5 sacks, as well as five forced fumbles — just one behind fellow rising NFL prospect Jachai Polite — for the national lead.

Scouts seemed to appreciate Hollins' growth more than Pac-12 media. Hollins was never recognized as an all-conference player at Oregon despite leaving the Ducks with 184 tackles, 36 tackles for loss, 14 sacks and seven forced fumbles over his career. He was, however, invited to the East-West Shrine Game, turning heads there with his raw tools.

Hollins' length and underrated overall athleticism could make him one to remember as the draft approaches. With the best football of his life still perhaps lying ahead of him, don't be surprised if a team gambles on his upside and nabs him higher than this projection.

**STRENGTHS:** Imposing condor-like frame with broad shoulders and a massive wingspan. Surprisingly agile for such a tall player, showing easy knee bend, balance and lateral agility to slide, shuffle and change direction with loose hips — athletic traits that project well to rushing upfield on twists and stunts as well as dropping back into coverage. Wasn't asked to cover often in this scheme but along with his surprising fluidity, Hollins also shows vision to track the ball and hand-eye coordination, recording six of his eight career passes defensed and five of his seven forced fumbles in 2018.

Smooth accelerator with long strides, giving him impressive top-end speed. Good push-pull technique to wrench his way free from blockers, showing better upper-body strength than his lanky frame would suggest. Noticeably bigger and stronger in his upper body in 2018 with some room for additional muscle mass.

**WEAKNESSES:** Isn't as physical as his imposing frame suggests, winning with length and athleticism rather than force, though he does show good hand strength. Broad across the shoulders but possesses relatively narrow hips and lacks ideal body thickness at this time. Rolls off the snap rather than exploding, lacking the elite quick-twitch to excel as a true speed rusher.

**Grade: 6.4**

### 14. SIONE TAKITAKI, BYU Cougars

6-2, 230 40 time: 4.75 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Takitaki is a flashy athlete well worth investigating, earning rave reviews from scouts who attended the East-West Shrine Game. If teams are convinced that his immaturity is behind him, Takitaki is likely to earn a middle-round selection, projecting as an immediate special teamer with the potential to ultimately compete for a starting role, most likely outside in a traditional 4-3 alignment.

**STRENGTHS:** Lanky, athletic frame with plenty of room for additional muscle mass. Above average-length for the position with good strength and hand-eye coordination to make tackles outside of his frame. Terrific suddenness to close on the ball once he locates it, flying onto the screen out of nowhere at times. Generates impressive collision power with his speed and shows no fear in doing so, cutting down the legs of talented open-field runners, showing his confidence and accurate strike zone. Seeks contact and plays hard, showing passion in pursuit.

Characterized as making a "remarkable transition" after getting married in June 2016, earning the role of team captain in 2018 after previously being a "knucklehead" with multiple suspensions on his record. Played his best ball in 2018, providing some evidence that he still has potential to tap.

**WEAKNESSES:** An older prospect with just one standout season as an off-ball linebacker, almost certainly his best chance at success in the NFL. Kamikaze-style defender who plays with a bull in a china shop mentality, smashing everything he can on his way to the ball. Instincts run hot and cold. Overly reliant on beating blockers with his athleticism or power, lacking coordinated technique, at this time, to cleanly disengage from blocks. Too often gets caught in the trash, taking risky angles in pursuit.

Comes with significant character red flags, albeit all at least two years ago. Was suspended three times and kicked off BYU's team at one point. Suspended for the second half of the 2015 season for various violations of team rules, including for fighting and petty theft, for which he admitted guilt, serving 180 days of suspended sentence, a year of probation and paying $680 in fines. Sat out the entire 2016 season.

**Grade: 6.2**

## 3 TO WATCH

### SLEEPER

**Sione Takitaki, BYU**
Labeled a trouble-maker early in his career, Takitaki has matured since getting married and his combination of size (6-1, 237) and athleticism turned heads at the East-West Shrine Game and Senior Bowl.

### COULD DISAPPOINT

**Christian Miller, Alabama**
Miller flashes more than a gaggle of paparazzi outside of the Oscars, but his consistent struggles with durability for the Crimson Tide suggest the title of this feature should be "Buyer Beware."

### SMALL SCHOOL STUD

**Terrill Hanks, New Mexico State**
Teams looking for the second coming of Colts' rookie Darius Leonard will certainly be intrigued by Hanks, a muscle-bound speed demon who wowed in Mobile.

## WORTH WATCHING

**Andrew Van Ginkel, Wisconsin (6-3, 236)**
Slowed by an ankle injury much of the season, but the former high school quarterback who also played at FCS South Dakota and Iowa Western in college, is expected to join Wisconsin linebacker teammates T.J. Edwards and Ryan Connelly as 2019 draftees.

**Dre Greenlaw, Arkansas (6-0, 227)**
Started 38 games in four years, battling some injuries along the way but finishing with 321 tackles.

**Jordan Jones, Kentucky (6-1, 218)**
Has injury/behavior red flags, but his speed and versatility could intrigue.

**Markus Jones, Angelo State (6-2, 256)**
Held his own (at least) at East-West Shrine Game after putting up ridiculous senior numbers: 17.5 sacks; 36.5 tackles for loss.

**Dante Booker, Ohio State (6-2, 235)**
Never lived up to expectations with the Buckeyes, but perhaps the former 5-star can find his form in an NFL camp, likely as an undrafted free agent.

*For further analysis of the 2019 outside linebackers, visit www.nfldraftscout.com.*

# Cornerbacks

**OVERVIEW** This year's class, remarkably, stacks up well against last year's crop that featured a rookie Pro Bowler (Denzel Ward, Browns) and several others — Minkah Fitzpatrick (Dolphins), Jaire Alexander (Packers), Mike Hughes (Vikings), Tre Flowers (Seahawks) — who look likely to compete for that distinction soon.

Ward enjoyed a steady rise up boards prior to the draft despite technically only starting one season with the Buckeyes. That's somewhat of a theme for a gifted but somewhat inexperienced group of cornerbacks for the 2019 draft — a group led by redshirt sophomores Andraez "Greedy" Williams from LSU and Washington's Byron Murphy.

Teams that want to save the roll of the dice until Day 2 might be intrigued by the raw athleticism shown by another Buckeye, speedy Kendall Sheffield ... or standouts from the nation title game, like Alabama's Saivion Smith and Trayvon Mullen from Clemson.

This year's class features plenty of candidates for the more risk-adverse teams selecting later in the draft. Georgia's Thorpe Award-winning Deandre Baker, Notre Dame's Julian Love and Temple's Rock Ya-Sin may not win the 40-yard dash, but they are as pro-ready as it gets, showing the instincts and competitiveness that translate to the next level.

**2019 CLASS GRADE**
**B+**

PHOTO BY DAVID ROSENBLUM/ICON SPORTSWIRE (ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA AP IMAGES)

*Denotes underclassman

### 1. ANDRAEZ "GREEDY" WILLIAMS, LSU*

6-2, 185 40 time: 4.40 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** LSU's reputation as DBU was only enhanced in 2018 with likely future first-round picks Williams and safety Grant Delpit living up to the standard established in the past by superstars Patrick Peterson, Tre'Davious White and Jamal Adams, among many others.

Long, lanky press corners have never been more popular than today, and Williams is as talented as they come — one of three finalists for the Thorpe Award as the nation's top defensive back in 2018. Teams wisely ignored his side of the field last season after he intercepted six passes and led the SEC with 17 passes defended as a redshirt freshman in 2017.

His exceptional upside warrants top-15 consideration but there is some bust potential here, as well. While Williams' combination of size, speed and ball-skills are tantalizing, he is not for everyone, showing more of a cover corner mentality against the run than scouts would prefer.

**STRENGTHS:** Comes with an exceptional combination of height, arm length and straight-line speed for the position. A natural cover corner who displays excellent balance and initial acceleration out of his stance, Williams is buttery smooth transitioning out of his crouch in press, typically remaining hip-to-hip with most receivers down the sideline or on crossing routes. When he is caught slightly behind his opponent, Williams' length saves the day as his length and excellent hand-eye coordination allow him to slip his mitts between those of opponents to either break up the pass or steal it for himself.

Truly has earned the nickname "Greedy" (given to him as a child by his grandmother) for his eagerness with the ball in flight, demonstrating excellent body control to win contested passes. Strong hands to pluck passes outside of his frame. A generally reliable open-field tackler who flashes physicality. Uses his length nicely to trip up ball-carriers on the perimeter. Can take effective routes to the ball in pursuit, showing his make-up speed and ability to track down ball-carriers from behind.

**WEAKNESSES:** Needs to show greater commitment to his craft, relying far too much on his natural traits and showing limited development in technique during his career. Plays with a cover corner mentality against the run, failing to show ideal competitiveness to fight through blocks and sometimes resorting to duck-and-swipe tackle attempts. Caught his head coach, Ed Orgeron, off guard by publicly announcing his decision to enter the 2019 draft and not participate in the Fiesta Bowl, a move that might draw questions from scouts during pre-draft interviews.

**NFL COMPARISION:** Aqib Talib, Los Angeles Rams — Like Talib, Williams' greatest attributes are his size, athleticism and ball skills that suggest Pro Bowls are in his future. Also like Talib, unfortunately, Williams

## FLASHBACK

**It takes at least three years to determine the success or failure of draft picks**

*Here's a snapshot of recent hits and misses*

### Diamond in the Rough

**Tre Flowers, Seahawks (Fifth round, 2018)**
Flowers was the 29th defensive back selected a year ago, but he bloomed in the Seattle rain, recording 67 tackles and three forced fumbles while starting 16 games (including the playoffs) as a rookie.

### Swing and Miss

**Kevin King, Packers (Second round, 2017)**
Shoulder injuries have proven a bugaboo for King, who has spent more weeks on Injured Reserve (17) over his first two NFL seasons as he has been active (15). The ex-Washington standout has just one NFL interception since being selected 33rd overall two years ago.

### Breakout Player

**Eli Apple, Saints (First round, 2016)**
A candidate for "Swing and Miss" just a few months ago, the swagger that epitomized Apple's game suddenly returned in New Orleans, where he recorded more passes broken up (10), interceptions (two) and tackles (52) than in any of his seasons in New York after being selected 10th overall by the Giants.

comes with inconsistencies on and off the field, factors teams will have to weigh before bringing him into their building.

**Grade: 8.3**

### 2. BYRON MURPHY, Washington*

6-0, 195 40 time: 4.40 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Despite opting to enter the draft with just 20 career games under his belt, Murphy showed a knack for producing big plays in big games — collecting interceptions against rival Washington State and Stanford as well as performing well in showdowns with Auburn and Ohio State to begin and end last season.

It isn't often that a player gives up two years of eligibility — especially when they've only started one full season — but Murphy is special, showing a degree of fluidity, physicality and ball-skills that scream top 20 pick and long-time NFL starter.

**STRENGTHS:** Sports a tapered, athletic frame with good overall height and arm length for the position. Easy athleticism is obvious in his movements. Excellent stop-start initial quickness with flexible ankles, greasy knees and loose hips to change directions in tight quarters. Easy accelerator with a smooth transition to turn and run downfield, showing the straight-line speed to handle vertical routes in man to man. Does not simply rely on his athleticism, showing terrific route awareness, often running cleaner routes than his opponents and leaving quarterbacks with little choice but to throw elsewhere.

Film study shows his ability to break downhill on quick outs and comeback routes, showing impressive hand-eye coordination and reach to bat passes away without playing through the receiver and drawing flags. Aggression carries through in run support, where Murphy shows above-average pop for the position, routinely lowering his shoulder into opponents to deliver bone-jarring hits.

Shows good hands, eyes and body control for the interception, tracking the ball well over either shoulder, timing his leaps and extending outside of his frame rather than allowing the ball into his pads.

**WEAKNESSES:** Has a playmaker mentality and is not above baiting quarterbacks, occasionally allowing himself to get flat-footed. Almost too aggressive as a tackler, showing a willingness to throw his body into the pile that could result in injury. Missed seven games in 2017 with a broken foot (fifth metatarsal), which might require a closer look from NFL teams.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Denzel Ward, Cleveland Browns — Though Ward played extensively as part of Ohio State's nickel package earlier in his career, the fact that he only started the 2017 season for the Buckeyes before earning the No. 4 overall selection in 2018 is a testament to his exceptional athleticism. Murphy is bigger than the scrappy Ward (5-11, 183) but just as agile ... and he, too, has the look of a future Pro Bowler after one season as a starter.

**Grade: 8.2**

### 3. DEANDRE BAKER, Georgia

5-11, 185 40 time: 4.57 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Baker plays with the highly competitive mentality scouts crave at cornerback, and he is about as battle-tested as it gets, showing the athleticism and awareness needed to succeed in bump and run, off-man and zone principles at the college level. He projects best to a zone scheme in the NFL, where his instincts, quickness to close and physicality will help make up for average speed.

**STRENGTHS:** While slightly smaller than preferred, Baker possesses a compact, athletic frame with good overall muscular distribution. He is light on his feet, showing the agility and acceleration to handle man-to-man duties, excelling in short and intermediate routes because of his honed anticipatory skills. A three-year starter, Baker has seen it all and his experience shows with his ability to undercut routes, demonstrating excellent click-and-close quickness. Impressive body control and hand-eye coordination to slip his hand between those of intended receivers to knock the ball away, recording nine passes broken up (in the run-heavy SEC) each of the past two seasons.

Highly competitive. Seems to enjoy the showdown offered by man-to-man coverage and is a scrapper in the running game, showing zero hesitation with bigger ball-carriers barreling towards him. Physical, wrap-up tackler who plays bigger than his size.

**WEAKNESSES:** May prove to be a better football player than athlete. While made faster due to his instincts, Baker shows just average straight-line speed, raising questions about his ability to handle man-to-man duties on the perimeter against the NFL's most explosive vertical threats. Too reliant on his initial jam at the line of scrimmage to re-route speedsters, lacking the instant acceleration to recover if beaten initially.

Possesses good but not great hands for the interception, turning seven of his 23 career passes defensed into turnovers. Raised some eyebrows with his decision to sit out the Sugar Bowl (which Georgia lost 28-21 to Texas) to get an early start in his preparation for workouts. As such, even if he runs well during workouts, some may wonder if this is "manufactured" speed that will not translate into live action on the gridiron.

**NFL COMPARISION:** Josh Norman, Washington Redskins — Norman is slightly larger (6-0, 200) and had a much tougher route to the NFL after playing his college ball at Coastal Carolina, but like Baker, he's proven his mettle against elite competition since, winning with quickness, instincts, physicality and tenacity more than straight-line speed (4.66 at 2012 Combine).

**Grade: 8.2**

## PROTOTYPE

**✔ Read & React**

**Deandre Baker, Georgia**
A three-year starter battle-tested at the highest level, Baker wins with guile and guts, starring despite somewhat average size and speed.

**✔ Coverage**

**Byron Murphy, Washington**
With his light feet, greasy knees and fluid hips, Murphy sticks to receivers like Saran Wrap.

**✔ Closing/Recovery**

**Kendall Sheffield, Ohio State**
A standout on the track as well as the gridiron, Sheffield's tape shows a player whose speed translates onto the field, as well.

**✔ Run Support**

**Kris Boyd, Texas**
They say all things are bigger in Texas and while Boyd, physically-speaking, does not necessarily live up to that standard, he makes up for it with his physical playing style that some believe projects best to safety.

**✔ Top Playmaker**

**Greedy Williams, LSU**
Williams lived up to his terrific name for a ball-hawk, collecting eight interceptions in just two seasons for the Tigers, showing excellent awareness, leaping ability and soft hands.

**✔ Intangibles**

**Rock Ya-Sin, Temple**
The Temple Owls were big winners when Presbyterian College opted to drop its football program, with Ya-Sin showing the commitment, competitiveness (and talent) to maximize his new big stage.

### 4. AMANI ORUWARIYE, Penn State

6-0, 203 40 time: 4.53 1st-2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Oruwariye ascended to first-team All-Big Ten accolades in 2018, when he registered a career-high 50 tackles and 11 passes broken up, as well as three interceptions — including a highlight-reel game-clincher in the end zone during overtime in the season-opener to stave off an upset bid by Appalachian State.

Sure, you wish he were a little more physical, but Oruwariye's exceptional combination of size, agility and maturity all indicate he'll be a long-time NFL starter. For all of his gifts, however, Oruwariye more teased than dominated during his Penn State career, leaving scouts to debate whether he is blossoming or just a one-year wonder.

**STRENGTHS:** He has a prototypical frame and his easy athleticism is obvious on tape. Possesses the light feet and fluid hip turn of a much smaller athlete, demonstrating exciting natural change of direction and acceleration for coverage duties. Poised with the ball in the air, showing impressive concentration to make difficult interceptions with opponents draped over him. Doesn't give up on the play if the receiver grasps the ball first, showing strength, hand-eye coordination and resiliency to rip at it to continue contesting the grab.

His size and agility are best suited to a man scheme, but he shows the route recognition and awareness to also handle zone responsibilities. Trusts his eyes and will vacate his initial responsibility if he senses the quarterback looking elsewhere; shows the courage to undercut routes and close in a flash. While not the most intimidating hitter, Oruwariye is a generally reliable wrap-up tackler.

**WEAKNESSES:** Though he improved in this area as a senior, Oruwariye is not as physical as his size would indicate, 'rassling down ball-carriers (and at times being dragged for a few yards), rather than exploding through them. He isn't a coward — showing a willingness to take out the knees of pulling guards when necessary and occasionally jumping into the pile — but he is not an intimidating striker. Played a lot at Penn State, but did not earn a starting role until his senior season, raising concerns for some as to how committed he is to his craft.

**NFL COMPARISION:** Prince Amukamara, Chicago Bears — In eight NFL seasons, Amukamara has never earned a trip to the Pro Bowl, but he has proven to be a quality starter in various schemes during stops in New York, Jacksonville and Chicago.

**Grade: 8.1**

### 5. TRAYVON MULLEN, Clemson*

6-1, 195 40 time: 4.45 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** For all of the hype that Clemson's dominant defensive line earned throughout the Tigers'

run to their second national title in three years, it was Mullen who took home Defensive MVP honors of the national title game, collecting six tackles, an interception and a forced fumble before announcing his intent to forgo his senior season.

Scouts can check a lot of boxes with Mullen, whose upside could warrant top 50 consideration for some. Coverage is a lot easier when playing behind that dominant defensive line, however, so there could be some growing pains.

**STRENGTHS:** Boasts a prototypical frame for a cornerback with rare height, broad shoulders, long limbs and easy movement skills. Belying his height, Mullen has low, tight backpedal with swivel hips to easily change direction, as well as almost instant acceleration and very good straight-line speed. Athletic enough to excel in press coverage without resorting to jamming the receiver. Appears to relish the challenge of one-on-one matchups in coverage, showing terrific stop-start quickness for combo routes and using his height, length and sneaky physicality to pin wideouts to the boundary line.

**WEAKNESSES:** Inconsistent hand placement when he does opt to jam receivers at the line, getting himself out of position, at times. Can get very handsy downfield, re-routing receivers and drawing flags for holding (Florida State). Far too willing to let teammates do the dirty work in run support, doing a lot of standing around the pile with just 25 assists on tackles over his career, including just six in 2018. Possesses an imposing frame but is just an average tackler at this time, too often resorting to duck-and-swipe tactics with determined runners breaking free of his arm tackles.

**Grade: 8.0**

### 6. ROCK YA-SIN, Temple

6-1, 190 40 time: 4.55 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** When Presbyterian College discontinued its football program, Ya-Sin transferred to Temple, where he emerged as one of the more intriguing risers of the 2019 draft, earning invitations to the East-West Shrine Game and Senior Bowl. While the added exposure in Philadelphia certainly helped, savvy scouts were already aware of Ya-Sin, who had started the previous three seasons at Presbyterian and had tied conference records for the most interceptions in a single season (five) and career passes broken up (24).

The yoked-up corner plays a physical brand of football, possesses great size and thrives in man coverage. Given how well he handled his one season at the FBS level, Ya-Sin is a compelling story and one worth watching leading into the draft.

**STRENGTHS:** Aptly-named given his rocked-up frame, a testament to a lot of time spent in the weight room. Aggressive with the ball in the air, playing with a "my-ball" mentality. Effective footwork and transition from side-shuffle and backpedal while changing directions, showing the burst to handle man-to-man duties. Earned the respect of (and a vaunted single-digit jersey from) the Temple coaching staff in just one year, an honor bestowed upon the nine players who most exhibit toughness and commitment to the team. Further caught the attention of NFL evaluators by recording two interceptions (one negated by a penalty on a Temple teammate) against the Buffalo QB/WR duo of Tyree Jackson/Anthony Johnson.

**WEAKNESSES:** High-cut and narrow-hipped, leaving him a bit stiff changing direction with choppy footwork. Too quick to open his hips to turn and run with speedier wideouts, surrendering pockets underneath too easily. Needs to do a better job of turning PBUs into INTs, with some drops on tape (Maryland). Can get tunnel vision and lock onto his receiver, failing to account for others around him or the running game.

**Grade: 7.9**

PHOTO BY RANDY LITZINGER/ICON SPORTSWIRE (ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA AP IMAGES)

### 7. JULIAN LOVE, Notre Dame*

5-10, 193 40 time: 4.55 2nd-3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Love lacks an eye-popping size-speed combination, which could mean other cornerbacks will be drafted earlier, but his awareness and steady tackling project well to the next level, especially for clubs who prioritize off or zone coverages. He earned a second-round grade by the NFL Advisory Committee, so he does project as an early NFL contributor, but not necessarily the star he was in college.

**STRENGTHS:** While a bit shorter than preferred, Love possesses a compact, athletic frame. Love is an active, athletic defender who shows awareness of routes around him, rather than locking onto just his primary assignment. He is quick to vacate his initial responsibility to pursue the ball, attacking up-field on underneath routes. Love's instincts, hand-eye coordination and downhill explosiveness show with his staggering 36 passes defended over the past two seasons, including a career-high 20 in 2017. Shows good patience in coverage, forcing receivers to beat him with speed before over-reacting to double-moves.

**WEAKNESSES:** May prove a better football player than athlete, possessing just average size and speed among cornerbacks. High in his backpedal and loses a step in his transition, allowing windows that quarterbacks challenged, giving Love plenty of opportunities to pad his PBU numbers but also resulting in plenty of receptions for opposing receivers. Loses effectiveness in coverage the further he gets downfield, with the vast majority of his pass breakups occurring on underneath routes.

**Grade: 7.9**

### 8. SAIVION SMITH, Alabama*

6-1, 200 4.52 2nd-3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A consensus five-star recruit viewed by some as the elite prep cornerback in the country, Smith signed with LSU but transferred to junior college after seeing limited playing time as a freshman. In his only season at Alabama, Smith recorded 60 tackles and three interceptions. Bouncing around from coach to coach has left some gaps in Smith's development, but the raw tools are undeniable. Teams that prefer length and physicality on the outside will certainly be intrigued by Smith's upside with a Day 2 selection likely.

**STRENGTHS:** Imposing frame for a cornerback. Shows comfort with a classic backpedal and side-shuffle when playing near the line of scrimmage. While a touch sticky out of his transition (like a lot of taller cornerbacks), Smith accelerates smoothly downfield, bodying up receivers to subtly pin them toward the boundary without extending his arms and drawing flags. Shows poise with the ball in the air, fighting through contact to make a play. His large wingspan gives Smith a wide tackle radius and he seems to enjoy the physical element of the game.

**WEAKNESSES:** Over-aggressive, at times, when lined up in press, sneaking a hand out to disrupt receivers' release and in doing so leaving himself flat-footed should they elude him, surrendering space. Some stiffness in his hips, needing an extra step to change direction and losing a step in his transition. May run well for the stopwatch but does not appear to possess ideal

recovery speed, struggling to catch up in pursuit, needing to take more gradual angles to the ball.

**Grade: 7.8**

### 9. KENDALL SHEFFIELD, Ohio State*

5-11, 190 40 time: 4.35 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Sheffield's reputation as a track star belies the fact that he's a physical and instinctive football player who immediately stood out amid all the talent at Ohio State (and quite possibly at Alabama, where he initially signed). In terms of all-conference honors and flashy statistics, Sheffield may not be as decorated as some of the other top cornerbacks in this year's class, but that is not going to stop a smart NFL team from gambling on his obvious upside earlier than some expect with a Day 2 pick likely assured — if, that is, he makes it out of the top 32.

**STRENGTHS:** Built (and tackles) like a football player but runs like a track star, breaking the Ohio State school record and the French Field House indoor record in the 60-meter dash in February 2018 with a time of 6.663 seconds, eclipsing a 23-year-old record at a program well known for producing speedsters. Varies his approach in press, showing an effective initial punch in bump and run and allowing a clean release on others, keeping receivers off balance and disrupting the timing with quarterbacks. Effortless acceleration. Trusts his eyes when playing off and in zone, showing zero hesitation in attacking up-field with a wicked burst.

**WEAKNESSES:** Not yet the sum of his parts. Needs to do a better job of protecting his chest and remaining on the balls of his feet when backpedaling, with receivers able to knock him off-balance (and even to the turf) to gain easy early separation (see, Washington and Maryland games). Takes risky angles in pursuit at times, relying upon his speed to bail him out. Questionable ball skills with just two interceptions (both in 2018) among 15 career passes defended.

**Grade: 7.7**

### 10. LONNIE JOHNSON JR., Kentucky

6-3, 203 40 time: 4.55 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Superstars Josh Allen and Benny Snell rightfully earned plenty of praise for their contributions to Kentucky's magical 2018 season, but Johnson deserves credit, as well. Watch out if Johnson commits to his craft; he possesses an undeniable size, athleticism and physicality package that could earn him a Top 100 pick — something no defensive back from Kentucky has received since 2001, when the Minnesota Vikings selected cornerback Eric Kelly 69th overall.

**STRENGTHS:** His swivel hips allow him to change directions and accelerate smoothly in pass coverage. Accurate strike zone when jamming at the line of scrimmage, showing good balance and coordination with his feet, but he isn't reliant on re-routing receivers, gaining adequate depth in his backpedal, as well as the loose hips to turn and get vertical quickly. Good body control to mirror receivers and showed improved route recognition in 2018, under-cutting short and intermediate routes to leave quarterbacks little room to operate. Opponents often elected to ignore his side of the field in 2018.

**WEAKNESSES:** As one might expect given his abbreviated time at the FBS level, Johnson, a junior college transfer, lacks polish in some areas, grabbing cloth or hands and drawing flags for holding despite being in good position. Admits that he considered quitting football prior to signing with Kentucky, raising some concerns about his commitment to living up to his talent. Comes with typical junior college questions about his commitment and ability to handle a complicated playbook.

**Grade: 7.4**

### 11. DARNELL SAVAGE JR., Maryland

5-10, 200 40 time: 4.50 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Savage capped his fourth season as a starter in 2018 by setting career-highs in interceptions (four) and tackles for loss (5.5) among his 52 overall takedowns. Savage is a fun prospect to evaluate because it is so easy to see what he does well (find and get to the ball) and where he could use some improvement (consistency as a tackler). The athletic traits are there to project Savage as a potential future starter in the NFL, warranting consideration possible Day 2 consideration.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses a short but compact frame. While lacking preferred size, Savage is a very physical defender, showing zero hesitation as a tackler or near the line of scrimmage and appearing to enjoy the combative nature of the sport. Savage is a coordinated, light-footed athlete showing good quickness and agility for underneath man-to-man coverage responsibilities. He was not asked to play much single-high safety but appears to possess the straight-line speed and vision to handle these duties. Possesses the instincts to be the last line of defense, routinely getting an early jump on the ball due to his diagnosis skills. Characterized as a team leader.

**WEAKNESSES:** Highly aggressive and can be baited with play-action and double moves. Shorter than ideal and may prove more quick than fast. Competitive in jump-ball situations, showing explosive leaping ability but can be victimized by larger receivers. Had no durability issues at Maryland but suffered a broken femur in high school that may require a closer look by NFL team doctors.

**Grade: 7.2**

### 12. JUSTIN LAYNE, Michigan State*

6-2, 185 40 time: 4.53 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** If Layne had more reliable hands, he likely never would have been asked to change from wide receiver to cornerback during his freshman year in 2016. His lack of ideal ball skills is a concern, but not one that should keep teams from considering a Day 2 selection to acquire his services as he possesses the size, athleticism and toughness as a tackler to project as a future starter on the perimeter.

**STRENGTHS:** Rare height for the position with plenty of room for additional muscle mass. Possesses very light feet and loose hips for an athlete his size, showing impressive quickness and change of direction for a long, perimeter cornerback. Competitive man-to-man corner, demonstrating good balance, instant acceleration and sneaky hands to harass receivers as the route progresses. Experience playing receiver shows in Layne's route awareness. Trusts his eyes and attacks downhill, showing an explosive ability to close,

# SPOTLIGHT

## Byron Murphy, Washington

*Take us back to the recruiting trail, what led you to Washington?* I felt a great connection with Coach (Jimmy) Lake and the staff at UW. It was where I was most comfortable and it was a place I thought would be able to make me a better player, but more so a better man. Being able to come in when guys like Sidney Jones, Budda Baker, and Kevin King were already there and to follow guys like Marcus Peters and Shaq Thompson, seeing where they all ended up, UW was an easy choice.

*What is your favorite memory of playing at Washington?* The Pac-12 championships. Definitely. Winning those games with my brothers are memories I will never forget. Especially this season, when I was able to make the plays to help my team win the game. Nothing like it.

*Are there players you model your game after? If so, who and why?* Tyrann Mathieu. I have followed his career closely because he wasn't the biggest. He was doubted for his size and weight. But he is a DOG. He plays the game the way it is supposed to be played — with heart, passion, energy. I was smaller growing up and I always wanted to bring the same mentality that Tyrann did.

*What is your greatest asset as a football player?* I would say my ball skills. As a DB, you have to be able to attack the ball when it is in the air. It is critical. We preach it heavily at UW and it is ingrained in our approach to preparation and our play on the field. Get after the football and get it back to our offense.

*What advice has recent Husky defensive backs given you about the pre-draft process?* Sidney Jones, Kevin King, Budda Baker are all still mentors of mine. They were great players at UW and are doing their thing in the NFL now. The best advice they gave me was to prepare. Watch film and prepare like a pro. Don't take anything for granted, especially the opportunity or the opponent and attack each day the right way so that on game days, you can have success.

*You are quite physical among this year's top-rated cornerbacks. How important is it in your mind to be a stopper against the run?* At UW, playing the run is as important as playing the ball. I think it is more important at times. Offenses try to attack the DBs because they often feel like they won't tackle. When you have that 1-on-1 meeting in the hole you can't run away. You have to step up and make that hit, make that stop, and get the ball-carrier down. It is a mindset, but something we preached at UW.

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as well as the long arms and hand-eye coordination to break up passes.

**WEAKNESSES:** Questionable ball skills with just three interceptions out of 24 career passes broken up. Too often appears content with breaking up passes rather than going for the interception, spiking at the ball to knock it away, rather than attempting to secure it or tip it to teammates. While more agile than most his size, like most taller corners, Layne can struggle maintaining position against smaller, quicker receivers, likely limiting him to only perimeter duties.

**Grade: 7.2**

### 13. KRIS BOYD, Texas

5-11, 190 40 time: 4.50 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** With 50 career games played (including 32 starts), few cornerbacks will enter the 2019 draft with more experience than Boyd, which suggests he may be readier to make an immediate impact than most. His physical nature and quickness in closing on underneath routes suggest that he would fit best in a zone-heavy scheme in the NFL.

**STRENGTHS:** While perhaps an inch or two shorter than ideal, Boyd checks boxes with good size for the position overall. Light feet, which help him accelerate quickly and provide him an extra split-second before opening his hips to anticipate the direction his receiver is going. Highly aggressive in his route anticipation, often gambling on underneath routes and delivering 30 passes broken up over the past two seasons. Best attribute might be Boyd's tenacity. Physical hitter who will leave his feet to deliver a strike, forcing three fumbles in his first two seasons at Texas. Athletic bloodlines. Cousins to two former NFL defensive backs, Bobby Taylor (10 seasons in NFL with Philadelphia Eagles, Seattle Seahawks) and Curtis Brown (three seasons with the Pittsburgh Steelers).

**WEAKNESSES:** Possesses some stiffness in his hips, which slows his transition and leave Boyd vulnerable to double-moves despite his quick feet. Accelerates quickly once his body is square but lacks elite recovery speed, leaving him in the dust occasionally on vertical routes and requiring help from the safety. Highly competitive on jump-ball situations but loses as many battles as he wins, appearing especially vulnerable on fades (Iowa State, TCU).

**Grade: 6.8**

### 14. DAVID LONG, Michigan*

6-0, 198 40 time: 4.53 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** It isn't often that a touted recruit out of Los Angeles who earned first-team all-conference honors at Michigan can accurately claim to be nationally underrated, but that might be the case with Long. He earned just third-team accolades from Big Ten media but was voted to the top squad by league coaches in 2018. Perhaps that is because Long posted relatively ho-hum statistics in 2018 (17 overall tackles, one interception) as opponents wisely elected to target others.

Long is a confident cover corner whose ideal blend of size and quickness allowed him to shut down opponents the past two seasons. NFL teams will have to gauge how much the Wolverines' vaunted pass rush had to do with Long's success (and lack of statistics), but the traits are certainly there to project him as a future NFL starter who could end up warranting a top-100 pick.

**STRENGTHS:** Good looking athlete with the size and athleticism to handle man-to-man coverage against a variety of targets. Possesses a well-built frame to match up against bigger receivers, as well as having very good balance and lateral agility to handle smaller, quicker pass-catchers. Moved, at times, to shadow featured targets, including lining up opposite tight ends in the slot (Notre Dame).

Quickness is the key term with Long, accurately describing his reactions to the ball being thrown, his hands to make plays on it, as well as his feet. Shows excellent initial lateral agility to disrupt the timing of receivers off the line of scrimmage, using his feet to shadow pass-catchers rather than relying on an initial jam. His explosive closing burst, power and reliable wrap-up tackling skills show he is plenty tough and may still have untapped potential as an enforcer.

**WEAKNESSES:** Too willing to let others do the dirty work, recording just 16 career assisted tackles (including seven in 2018) during his college career. Prone to standing just outside of the pile. Doesn't back down from blocking wide receivers, but fails to take the fight to them, absorbing rather than initiating the contact. Too often steers ball-carriers toward the sideline. Shows good but not elite speed on deep routes.

**Grade: 6.7**

### 15. HAMP CHEEVERS, Boston College*

5-10, 185 40 time: 4.50 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Cheevers was one of the year's biggest breakout stars, intercepting seven passes and earning first-team All-ACC honors in his first year as a starter for Boston College. Undersized and unlikely to duplicate that production, Cheevers understandably is hoping to parlay his success into getting drafted into the NFL — though that isn't likely to happen until Day 3.

**STRENGTHS:** Lightning quick, especially when coming downhill. Showed the route-anticipation of a veteran in his first year as a starter, undercutting routes and showing pillow-soft hands to turn breakups into interceptions. Excellent awareness of the ball in flight, turning to locate and morphing into a receiver, taking a "my ball" mentality with terrific timing and positioning. Excellent hand-eye coordination to adjust to tipped passes quickly (Temple, Miami). Low, tight back pedal, and easily changes direction. Feisty and physical, playing bigger than he'll measure, including in run support.

**WEAKNESSES:** Slim build overall with bean stalks for limbs. Pesky in press, but bigger receivers brush past his jams too easily. Highly aggressive, biting on double-moves and leaving himself vulnerable to big plays over the top. Reckless in run support, at times, as well, taking questionable angles to the ball. Does not appear to have a late burst to close vertically.

**Grade: 6.4**

### 16. ISAIAH JOHNSON, Houston

6-3, 203 40 time: 4.55 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** An accomplished track star and receiver in high school, Johnson caught 21 passes for 208 yards in his first two seasons at Houston before being convinced that his greatest chance at making an NFL roster would be at cornerback. Johnson looks straight out of a Seattle Seahawks starter kit, possessing the height, length and athletic profile head coach Pete Carroll has prioritized since joining the team. Just two years removed from playing wide receiver, this Senior Bowl invitee comes with exciting upside ... but make no mistake, he is a project.

**STRENGTHS:** Among the more imposing cornerbacks in the 2019 draft, hulking over receivers with a massive frame complete with very broad shoulders and vines for arms. Shows surprising flexibility when changing directions as well as impressive build-up speed. At his best in press coverage, using his size to simply smother wideouts at the line of scrimmage, ruining timing with their quarterbacks. Improved route recognition, physicality and overall reliability in run support as a senior, suggesting his best football may still lie ahead of him.

**WEAKNESSES:** Very much a work in progress. Overly reliant upon his size and speed in coverage, needing to clean up his hand placement and footwork technique in press. Frenetic footwork at the mesh point, which leaves him off-balance too often, especially against quicker receivers. While imposing in size, Johnson does not consistently play to his bulk, resorting to drag-down tackles rather than explosive collisions. When he does decide to bully receivers, Johnson has a tendency to go overboard, showing questionable body control and timing on his leaps and too often grabbing at a jersey.

**Grade: 6.3**

### 17. MICHAEL JACKSON, Miami

6-1, 205 40 time: 4.49 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Scouts like to suggest that a player's stock cannot drop by returning for his senior season, but after Jackson went from a breakout four-intercep-

tion campaign in 2017 to a more hesitant final year in which he failed to record a pick, he could test that theory. His size and upside will likely draw the interest of press or zone-heavy teams in the middle rounds with some perhaps considering him as a potential convert to safety.

**STRENGTHS:** Looks the part of an NFL press corner, with above-average height, broad shoulders and disproportionately long arms. Varies his approach in press, showing the ability to catch receivers off the ball with his length and physicality. Understands how to use the sideline as a 12th defender, leaving quarterbacks little room to squeeze passes over the top. Long-strider with good build-up speed to handle vertical routes. Good awareness while in zone coverage of underneath routes. Showed intriguing timing and determination on the blitz, exhibiting lateral agility and creativity to avoid would-be blockers as well as closing speed.

**WEAKNESSES:** Like a lot of taller cornerbacks, Jackson lacks the nifty footwork to remain hip to hip with smaller, quicker receivers on combination routes. Forced to throttle down when making sharp turns, creating gaps in coverage. Overly reliant on his arms to latch onto receivers at the line of scrimmage, showing just average coordination and quickness with his feet. A solid tackler for a cornerback, but he might not possess the aggression or consistent strike zone to handle a switch to safety.

**Grade: 6.3**

### 18. JOEJUAN WILLIAMS, Vanderbilt*

6-2, 208 40 time: 4.55 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Williams may lack for name recognition among college football fans, but he will not among scouts. He led the SEC with 15 passes defended — 11 pass breakups, four interceptions — in a breakout 2018 campaign. Athletic enough to remain at cornerback, but possessing enough size to handle safety duties, Williams may only need to prove his straight-line speed to warrant a higher overall grade and earlier-round consideration. Projects best in a press-heavy scheme.

**STRENGTHS:** Outstanding size for the position. Surprisingly nimble for a cornerback of his size, showing light feet and a relatively smooth turning motion to handle deep coverage responsibilities. Accelerates smoothly, gobbling up yards with his long strides and yet showing impressive balance when throttling down, changing directions efficiently. Complementing his underrated athleticism, Williams is an instinctive defender with very good route recognition, running some shallow routes cleaner than the receivers he was tasked with covering. Far from just a coverage specialist, Williams showed instincts and physicality in run support, which could have some NFL teams viewing him as a potential safety.

**WEAKNESSES:** Too physical for his own good, at times. Can get off balance with his initial jam of the receiver and isn't afraid to trade jabs down the sidelines, battling for position. Like most taller corners, Williams is a bit vulnerable to shiftier wideouts, projecting exclusively as a perimeter corner (or even a safety). He could do a better job of turning his head to locate the ball as it arrives on fades.

**Grade: 6.2**

### 19. JIMMY MORELAND, James Madison

5-11, 175 40 time: 4.50 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A difference-maker since stepping onto the field at JMU, Moreland proved that he was not just a product of weak competition, turning heads at the East-West Shrine Game with his boisterous play and earning a promotion the following week as a late addition to the Senior Bowl. While lacking preferred size, Moreland's agility and ball-skills are certainly NFL-caliber, warranting middle-round consideration.

**STRENGTHS:** Cat-quick cover corner with terrific ball-skills, recording 18 interceptions at JMU and returning six for touchdowns. Low and tight backpedal with rocket boosters attached to his feet to quickly close on underneath routes, including quick screens. Good balance and loose hips in his transition, allowing Moreland to change directions fluidly without throttling down. Understands body positioning, making him surprisingly effective against bigger receivers by maintaining his position between the pass-catcher and quarterback. Terrific awareness of the ball in the air, showing the vision and body control to corral passes over either shoulder. Plays bigger than he'll measure.

**WEAKNESSES:** Significantly undersized with relatively narrow shoulders and hips, suggesting he will struggle to add much weight without impacting his speed and quickness. More pesky than powerful as a tackler, getting dragged, at times. A trash-talker who might rub some the wrong way. Requires a thorough background evaluation. Kicked off the team in 2015 after he and two teammates were charged with theft, only being accepted back by the new administration based on the feedback of his position coach.

**Grade: 6.1**

### 20. JAMEL DEAN, Auburn

6-1, 208 40 time: 4.50 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A press-heavy team willing to roll the dice on Dean's extensive medical history — he underwent three knee surgeries over a four-year span before arriving at Auburn after not passing doctors' evaluations at Ohio State — could be handsomely rewarded, as his raw talent is undeniable. Dean's ultimate grade hinges on those medicals, with it entirely possible that some clubs view him as a top 100 candidate and others removing him from their board entirely.

**STRENGTHS:** Looks more like a safety than a cornerback, sporting a broad-shouldered, thick frame. Very good patience and balance for press coverage, showing a smooth hip turn to quickly change directions and remain locked on with receivers. Possesses enough length and physicality at the point of attack to effectively jam receivers to throw off timing with the quarterback but does not rely on this initial bump. Dependable open-field tackler who flashes physicality. Highly regarded by Auburn coaches and players for his dedication and resilience.

**WEAKNESSES:** Loses track of receivers, at times, when playing in zone or off coverages. Slow to react to the action in front of him. Did not appear tentative in 2018 (and did not wear a knee brace) but made some business decisions, leaving teammates to do the dirty work when possible, contributing just eight total assists on tackles in 2018. Needs to do a better job of looking back for the ball in flight rather than simply face-guarding receivers.

**Grade: 6.1**

PHOTO BY JAMIE HARMS-USA TODAY SPORTS

### 21. JAMAL PETERS, Mississippi State

6-1, 220 40 time: 4.60 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The Bulldogs' vaunted pass rush, led by projected first-round picks Montez Sweat and Jeffery Simmons, earned most of the attention this year, but savvy scouts won't look past Peters, whose exciting blend of size, agility and physicality projects nicely to cornerback as well as safety. That positional versatility is likely to earn Peters a Day 3 selection.

**STRENGTHS:** Has nice size for the position, with a frame that suggests a move back to safety (where he started as a freshman) could be in order. Peters mostly plays to his size, delivering some monster hits and throttling passing lanes with his broad shoulders and long arms. Tall in his backpedal but shows surprisingly light feet and an efficient turning motion to accelerate smoothly with at least adequate top-end speed. Imposing in the open field, proving an intimidating presence for receivers going across the middle.

**WEAKNESSES:** Doesn't take full advantage of his height with the ball in the air, routinely mistiming his leap and attempting to corral the ball at eye or even chest level rather extending to the highest point. Shows below-average hands, spiking the ball out of the air like a volleyball player rather than going for the turnover. Missed four games in 2018 due to injury (leg) and suspension (fighting vs. Mississippi), which each require closer investigation.

**Grade: 5.9**

### 22. SEAN BUNTING, Central Michigan*

6-0, 185 40 time: 4.50 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Bunting opted to give up his final year of eligibility following the firing of CMU head coach John Bonamego. As a junior in 2018, Bunting was a first-team All-MAC selection who registered 37 tackles, two interceptions, two forced fumbles and one blocked kick. He developed quite a reputation at CMU for his knack for creating turnovers, forcing four fumbles over the past three seasons and picking off nine passes.

**STRENGTHS:** Good-looking cornerback with broad shoulders and long arms. Looks comfortable lined up in press coverage, showing balance to bounce off either leg while extending his arm to get an initial jam. Aggressive over the first 5 yards, riding receivers with his length and strong hands. Good hand-eye coordination to knock the ball free. Physical hitter who looks to lower his shoulder and drive through the ballcarrier. Trusts his eyes. Sneaks a peek back at the quarterback and shows awareness of other receivers around him.

**WEAKNESSES:** Gives up inside releases too often, lacking the recovery speed to undercut slants or

crossing routes in time to remain between the quarterback and his intended receiver. High, choppy backpedal. Loses a step in his transition from full backpedal to vertical running, opting to use a side-shuffle technique. Runs hot and cold with his initial jam, absorbing as many blows as he gives. Extends his hands to blatantly grab cloth if beaten off the snap, making it too easy on officials to throw the flag.

Grade: 5.8

### 23. JORDAN BROWN, South Dakota State

6-1, 199 40 time: 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Brown did not look out of place amid all of the talent at the Senior Bowl, holding his own throughout the week of practice and breaking up a pass during the game. Corners with Brown's size and fluidity are a valued commodity, but to stick, he'll need to improve as a tackler.

**STRENGTHS:** Thick frame that makes him look more like a safety than a corner, though his hips are certainly corner-caliber. Shows an easy transition from backpedal to vertical, smoothly changing directions to stick in the hip of receivers in man coverage. Good route awareness, overall, anticipating receivers' cuts and keeping his frame between the quarterback and his intended target. Shows poise, timing and at least average hands with the ball in the air, turning back to locate it and competing. Broke up 27 passes at SDSU with eight interceptions.

**WEAKNESSES:** Disappointing tackler, especially for a player of his size. Fails to wrap securely with multiple missed tackles on tape (North Dakota, Kennesaw State). Willing to take on hard-charging blockers but shows little form in doing so, simply sacrificing his body rather than challenging the block in the hopes of blowing up the play. Shows little awareness of cut blocks and crackbacks. Plays with blinders on in coverage, focusing on his receiver downfield with the rest of the defense reacting to a run.

Grade: 5.7

### 24. KEISEAN NIXON, South Carolina

5-10, 194 40 time: 4.54 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** When you grow up in Compton, the USC most imagine they'll be playing their collegiate football at is with the Southern California Trojans, but it was the Gamecocks who came crowing for Nixon after a successful tour at Arizona Western Junior College. Nixon possesses an unusual squatty frame for a cornerback, projecting best as a nickel corner or perhaps safety in the NFL.

**STRENGTHS:** Shows good awareness of routes developing around him and trusts his instincts, often heading toward the ball before it arrives. Quick, tight backpedal with good lateral agility to make sharp diagonal cuts. Smooth transition from his backpedal to running vertically with at least average top-end speed. Takes good angles to the ball and is a physical, confrontational tackler who drives through his hips to stop most ballcarriers in their tracks.

**WEAKNESSES:** Quicker than fast and may struggle to handle the vertical speed he'll face if left outside in the NFL. Highly aggressive, sitting on underneath routes and leaving himself vulnerable to double-moves from savvy receivers. Only emerged as a full-time starting cornerback in 2018 and collected zero interceptions (among nine pass breakups) in 12 games.

Grade: 5.6

### 25. COREY BALLENTINE, Washburn

5-11, 188 40 time: 4.50 5th-6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Ballentine was a man among boys at the D-II level, winning the Cliff Harris Award as the best "small school" defensive player in the country. He looked right at home at the Senior Bowl, easing concerns about his ability to handle the jump in competition. With his length, speed, proven ball-skills and physical nature, he appears likely to join former Washburn cornerback Cary Williams (229th overall in 2008) and defensive tackle Trey Lewis (185th overall in 2007) as the only Ichabod players drafted into the NFL this century.

**STRENGTHS:** Fluid mover with light feet and loose hips, showing good change of direction and top-end speed. Physical player with good closing speed and bad intentions when it comes to run support, showing toughness in fighting through blocks and an accurate strike zone as a tackler. Good awareness of the ball in coverage with proven ball-skills, turning three of his seven pass breakups into interceptions in 2018 while serving as the team's primary kick-returner. Shows good vision to set up blocks with the ball in his hands. Quality specials team defender, as well, with four career blocked kicks, including three in 2018.

**WEAKNESSES:** Obvious level of competition concerns. Victimized, at times, by savvy route-runners at the Senior Bowl, needing to show greater anticipation of routes. A bit stiff in his transition, running faster for the stopwatch than he plays. Simply a better athlete than the receivers he was asked to cover at the lower level, relying upon his athleticism at times.

Grade: 5.5

### 26. BLACE BROWN, Troy

6-0, 186 40 time: 4.50 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** If teams are satisfied that Brown has recovered fully from a torn ACL, he could prove a quality diamond-in-the-rough candidate for Day 3. Brown left Troy with 12 career interceptions, showing the awareness and soft hands that every team is looking for in today's pass-happy NFL, and he has a track record of overcoming expectations, making Troy's roster as a walk-on.

**STRENGTHS:** Has a tight, low backpedal, showing the swivel hips to quickly change directions with at least passable speed, overall. A natural in coverage, showing good awareness of routes developing around him and poise when the ball is in the air. At his best in off-man coverage, showing patience and good route awareness at the stem. Effective drag-down tackler with good strength and length. Willing to stick his nose (and fist) into the pile, punching at the ball as teammates gang-tackle the ballcarrier. Athletic bloodlines: nephew of running back legend Herschel Walker.

**WEAKNESSES:** A smooth but not sudden accelerator who may lack preferred top-end speed, too often resorting to grabbing cloth to corral receivers downfield. Willing to let others do the dirty work as a tackler, only attacking in run support when forced. Suffered a torn ACL (December 2017) at the end of his junior season, which impacted his play in 2018, limiting him to six starts in 12 games.

Grade: 5.5

### 27. IMAN MARSHALL, USC

6-1, 203 40 time: 4.53 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Marshall is a gifted prospect, but he comes with a bit of a reputation for coasting on his natural tools, a notion reinforced by the fact he recorded zero interceptions the past two seasons, despite breaking up 19 passes during that time. Marshall had previously impressed with his ball-skills, collecting six interceptions (among 17 breakups) over his first two seasons as a starter. The team that feels it can light a fire under Marshall could be handsomely rewarded, with the prototypically built defender projecting as at least a rotational defender ... and perhaps much more.

**STRENGTHS:** Matches up well with bigger receivers, appearing to enjoy the one-on-one showdowns. Uses his large frame to body-up receivers, pinning them to the sideline on vertical routes. A bit high in his backpedal but possesses quick feet and springs in his knees to make sharp diagonal cuts. Loses a step in his transition but knows it and reacts accordingly, showing good anticipatory skills to open his hips early and turn to run vertically. Tracks the ball well, reading the eyes of the receiver and turning to locate the ball. Aggressive in run support.

**WEAKNESSES:** Not the sum of his parts. Runs hot and cold in coverage, guessing wrong too often. A bit stiff, forcing him to open his hips earlier than smaller, niftier corners, and in doing so surrenders space that accurate quarterbacks can pick apart on quick throws or beat him over the top on double-moves. Loses a step in his transition, though he does show at least average speed overall, especially for a bigger corner.

Grade: 5.4

## 3 TO WATCH

### SLEEPER

**Joejuan Williams, Vanderbilt**
There are questions about his straight-line speed, but teams looking for a long, physical cornerback who projects similarly as Seattle's surprising rookie standout Tre Flowers will want to check out this Commodore.

### COULD DISAPPOINT

**Trayvon Mullen, Clemson**
Mullen was brilliant in the national title game, earning Defensive MVP honors, but playing behind a dominant defensive line makes things easier.

### SMALL SCHOOL STUD

**Jimmy Moreland, James Madison**
Dominating at the lower levels earned Moreland invitations to the East-West Shrine Game and Senior Bowl, where he showed off the competitiveness and instincts to quiet any critics.

## WORTH WATCHING

**Mark Fields, Clemson (5-10, 180)**
Looked good against 'Bama in title game; plenty of upside on Day 3.

**Clifton Duck, Appalachian State (5-10, 175)***
Not big, but he's a speedy ball-hawk who picked off 12 passes in three seasons.

**Derrick Baity Jr., Kentucky (6-2, 188)**
Press-man corner has length and a physical style of play.

**Alijah Holder, Stanford (6-1, 188)**
A lengthy, athletic, well-coached corner who has dealt with injuries.

**Montre Hartage, Northwestern (6-0, 195)**
Solid in man and zone coverage, and he has particularly pesky hands.

*For further analysis of the 2019 cornerbacks, visit www.nfldraftscout.com.*

# Safeties

DEIONTE THOMPSON

PHOTO BY: JASON GETZ-USA TODAY SPORTS

**OVERVIEW** Good news for teams looking for safeties — the 2019 crop looks even better than last year, which is saying something, considering that Los Angeles Chargers rookie Derwin James was voted to the Pro Bowl.

Several other teams found quality starters throughout last year's draft, including the Miami Dolphins with first-round pick Minkah Fitzpatrick, the Cincinnati Bengals with second-round standout Jessie Bates III, Justin Reid ranking among the Houston Texans' leading tacklers and interceptors after being drafted 68th overall, and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers finding a starter on Day 3 nearly 50 picks later in Jordan Whitehead.

There are plenty of middle-round sleeper candidates to be had in the 2019 draft, as well, but teams would be wise to invest early rather than hope for a bargain later, given the top-shelf talent available this year.

Rangy centerfielder Deionte Thompson keeps the pipeline from Alabama's secondary to the NFL's first round going strong. Fellow underclassmen Taylor Rapp (Washington), Amani Hooker (Iowa) and Chauncey Gardner-Johnson (Florida) are future NFL starters, as well.

After a terrific week in Mobile, Ala., for the Senior Bowl, Delaware's Nasir Adderley checks in as NFLDraftScout.com's top-rated senior safety and arguably the best "small school" prospect in the 2019 draft.

**2019 CLASS GRADE**
**B+**

*Denotes underclassman

### 1. DEIONTE THOMPSON, Alabama*

6-2, 196 40 time: 4.50 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** With today's modern passing attacks, safeties with range, reliable tackling ability and ball skills are more critical than ever. That fact is likely to earn Thompson — fast, physical and able to track passes like a wide receiver — a very high selection in the draft. He is looking to become the eighth Alabama defensive back to crack the top 32 since 2010.

Like most of his teammates at Alabama, Thompson was a heralded recruit, but it was not until the final two games of the 2017 season — his third on campus — that he finally got his opportunity to start. Thompson performed brilliantly against Clemson and Georgia, setting the stage for an All-America campaign in 2018 in which he emerged as the emotional leader of Alabama's secondary and arguably the nation's elite defensive back prospect.

**STRENGTHS:** Has a prototypical build for a modern safety with broad shoulders, a tapered middle and disproportionately long arms. A fantastic athlete for the position, possessing rare fluidity in changing directions, as well as very good straight-line speed. Savvier in coverage than his experience would suggest, showing an understanding of route development and getting a jump start on passes due to his anticipation.

Has been publicly acknowledged by head coach Nick Saban for his film study and preparation. Very capable of dropping down and handling man-to-man coverage responsibilities, showing confidence in coverage, even with his back to the quarterback. Only had three career interceptions, but looks like a natural catching the football, using his length, body control and soft hands to pluck passes outside of his frame that other defensive backs would do well just to bat away.

A reliable open-field tackler who isn't afraid of physicality. Is not reliant on big hits to knock down ball-carriers, utilizing his length and underrated strength to wrap and finish. Shows excellent late explosiveness to separate the ball from the man; forced four fumbles in 2018. Good effort and path in pursuit, showing vision, speed and timing to trip up ball-carriers from behind.

**WEAKNESSES:** Had just one season as Alabama's full-time starter and was surrounded by an all-star cast. In an effort to create splashy plays near or behind the line of scrimmage, Thompson occasionally takes risky angles in run support racing through the alley, lunging at the legs of the ball-carrier. A bit high-cut, which leaves him vulnerable to shorter, quicker players when in man coverage.

Will have to answer questions about his character following an April 25, 2017, charge of felony aggravated assault in which he and three former high school teammates allegedly beat a man, resulting in a concussion and several broken bones in his face.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Eddie Jackson, Chicago Bears — Thompson is bigger and has not suffered through the injuries that pushed Jackson (6-0, 200) to the fourth

## FLASHBACK

**It takes at least three years to determine the success or failure of draft picks**

*Here's a snapshot of recent hits and misses*

### Diamond in the Rough

**John Johnson, Rams (Third round, 2017)**
Johnson was the 23rd defensive back selected in 2017, but he led all rookie safeties with 12 passes defensed (returning an interception 69 yards) and was third in tackles (75). He had 119 tackles and four picks in 2018.

### Swing and Miss

**Calvin Pryor, Jets (First round, 2014)**
The former No. 18 overall pick was released by the Jaguars in December after the Jets shipped him to Cleveland. Pryor, 25, has two interceptions in 56 career NFL games.

### Breakout Player

**Malik Hooker, Colts (First round, 2017)**
The durability concerns that dropped Hooker on draft day were realized with the former All-American only playing in seven games his rookie season. He collected three INTs in that short span, however.

round of the 2017 draft. But in terms of instincts, range and big-play chops, Thompson appears to be cut out of the same (crimson) cloth as Jackson, a 2018 Pro Bowler with six interceptions in his second season in the NFL.

**Grade: 8.2**

### 2. TAYLOR RAPP, Washington*

6-0, 200 40 time: 4.55 1st round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Chris Petersen has helped Washington return to national prominence in part due to a focus on recruiting OKGs, or what he calls "Our Kind of Guys." A perfect example of this is Rapp, a Chinese-American from a city just south of the Canadian border who began his college career labeled as "just" a three-star talent from recruiting experts.

In the three years since, Rapp earned recognition as the Pac-12's freshman Defensive Player of the Year, a first-team all-conference choice at safety as a sophomore and a consensus All-American in 2018. Rapp was one of the nation's best open-field tacklers, offering a consistency on and off the field that has him considered to be one of the safest prospects in the draft and an easy first-round pick.

**STRENGTHS:** While perhaps an inch or two shorter than ideal, Rapp looks the part of an NFL safety with a compact, well-muscled frame that provides the perfect body armor for his highly aggressive, physical style of play. Rapp's greatest attributes are his awareness and tackling ability. He shows Jedi-like instincts in locating the football, with magnets for hands, resulting in seven interceptions and being part of five fumbles (two forced, three recovered) in three seasons. Furthermore, Rapp shows remarkable body control as a tackler, racing in from the secondary to make difficult tackles on elusive ball-carriers look easy.

Generally speaking, he is a technically sound face-up tackler who wraps his arms for the secure stop, but he creates impressive stopping power and shows excellent hand-eye coordination to trip up runners seemingly out of his reach. Rapp's awareness also shows up in coverage, where he displays excellent route recognition, as well as impressive coordination and quickness in changing directions to stick in the hip pocket of potential receivers. Younger than most prospects; just turned 21 in December.

**WEAKNESSES:** Appears more quick than fast and might lack preferred top-end speed for deep duties, especially for defenses planning to run a lot of single-high safety looks. Highly regarded for his playmaking ability but at times appears too willing to concede the reception and make the tackle rather than attack the ball.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Patrick Chung, New England Patriots — Both safeties ranked among the cleanest prospects in their respective drafts. Like Chung, the 34th overall pick in 2009 and now a 10-year starter, Rapp has the look of a future franchise stalwart.

**Grade: 8.0**

### 3. NASIR ADDERLEY, Delaware

5-11, 200 40 time: 4.50 1st-2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Players at the FCS level need to dominate to earn the attention of NFL scouts. That is precisely what Adderley accomplished at Delaware, starting every game the past four seasons — the first two at cornerback, the final two at free safety — and being honored as a finalist for the Buck Buchanan Award (the top overall FCS player) in 2018.

The Philadelphia native covers a tremendous amount of ground, displaying natural instincts and hard-hitting ability, along with the ability to score with the ball in his hands. Among the first players announced as invited to the prestigious Senior Bowl, Adderley is viewed by some as the year's elite "small-school" prospect.

The tape shows a complete safety with the range, reliable tackling, physicality and ball skills to warrant top 50 consideration.

**STRENGTHS:** Ideal build and a legitimate NFL athlete, with impressive initial quickness, change of direction and acceleration. Has impressive closing speed when delivering tackles. Above-average speed is enhanced further due to stellar instincts, forged by starting 40-plus games during his college career. Good route awareness and timing to break up passes, flashing the ability to make the remarkable catch (one-handed interception vs. Towson in 2017). Plays bigger than his listed size, routinely delivering aggressive (but clean) hits.

He capped his career in style, recording a personal-best 87 tackles and leading his team with four interceptions and seven passes defended. Adderley showed off his versatility against New Hampshire with a 92-yard kickoff return for a touchdown, as he trucked over a defender for one of the top college football plays of the year.

Good bloodlines, too: His cousin, Herb Adderley, was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1980. His grandfather, Nelson Adderley, played at Ohio State and later in the Canadian Football League.

**WEAKNESSES:** Adderley checks every box except level of competition. May need some time adjusting to the greater speed of the NFL, often taking very aggressive routes in pursuit. Slightly undersized for the position, especially given his physical style of play.

**NFL COMPARISON:** Minkah Fitzpatrick, Miami Dolphins — The 11th overall pick of last spring's draft made quite the splash as a rookie with the Dolphins, proving he belonged immediately by showing off the same instincts, versatility and flair for the dramatic that made him such a star at Alabama.

**Grade: 7.9**

### PROTOTYPE

**✔ Man Coverage**

**Darnell Savage Jr., Maryland**
Savage possesses the light feet and fluid turning motion to drop down and match up against receivers and tight ends.

**✔ Zone Coverage**

**Will Harris, Boston College**
While perhaps lacking the speed to stay hip to hip with receivers on his own, Harris' awareness and steady open-field tackling make him a quality zone defender.

**✔ Closing/Recovery**

**Deionte Thompson, Alabama**
Thomas boasts prototypical range to handle single-high duties, showing an explosive late burst as a hitter and when the ball is available.

**✔ Ball Skills**

**Juan Thornhill, Virginia**
An instinctive defender with soft hands, Thornhill intercepted 12 passes over his career, showing off the desired playmaking for the NFL.

**✔ Run Support**

**Jaquan Johnson, Miami**
Johnson may not be the most imposing prospect on the list, but no one shows more aggression or physicality in fighting through blockers and plugging the run.

**✔ Tackling**

**Taylor Rapp, Washington**
Rapp is a technically-sound wrap-up tackler, whose closing burst and balance make it difficult for even the most elusive ball-carriers to escape his grasp.

**✔ Intangibles**

**Khari Willis, Michigan State**
On and off the field, Willis is a coach's dream. He was voted a team captain in 2018 and was nominated for the Senior CLASS award due to academic and charitable work while at MSU.

### 4. CHAUNCEY GARDNER-JOHNSON, Florida*

6-0, 203 40 time: 4.55 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** While there is no doubt that Gardner-Johnson enjoyed his most consistent season in 2018 — recording career-highs in tackles (71), tackles for loss (nine), interceptions (four) and touchdowns scored (two) — his success came as no surprise.

NFL teams love playmakers and Gardner-Johnson, a former top recruit, certainly is that, offering a tantalizing combination of big-play chops, experience against elite competition and position versatility. Questionable deep speed, however, makes Gardner-Johnson a bit of a feast-or-famine type, which could result in some polarizing grades. He did show improved consistency in 2018, creating the optimism that he could be a Day 2 pick.

**STRENGTHS:** Boasts a compact, athletic frame with good muscular development throughout. Gardner-Johnson's best attribute may be his versatility and instincts to play all over the secondary. Eager to attack the running game. Terrific route-awareness and click-and-close quickness for zone coverage, instantly vacating his prior responsibility to close on underneath passes. Comfortable playing near the line of scrimmage, showing good awareness, balance and core strength to fight blockers to make plays in traffic, including against bigger ball-carriers.

Good quickness and change of direction for man coverage responsibilities and seems to enjoy the competition, showing a willingness to talk smack with opponents. Trusts his eyes and shows zero hesitation when he sees the ball, resulting in several impactful plays over his college career. Above-average hands and body control among defensive backs.

**WEAKNESSES:** Appears to possess just average straight-line speed for the position, making him reliant upon his instincts to make big plays and too often in trailing position when he allows big plays to opponents. Too easily manipulated by savvy quarterbacks, who can look him off and then come back to attack him after he is left flat-footed.

**Grade: 7.8**

### 5. AMANI HOOKER, Iowa*

5-11, 210 40 time: 4.55 2nd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The Hawkeyes have produced a lot of instinctive defensive backs over the years, but few possess a more prototypical combination of size, agility and ball-skills than Hooker. Former teammate Josh Jackson set the bar pretty high last year by getting selected 45th overall (by Green Bay), one spot later than Colts standout Bob Sanders was selected 15 years

ago. Hooker could wind up beating them both.

**STRENGTHS:** Already looks the part of a five-year NFL veteran with a thick, broad-shouldered frame and excellent overall weight distribution. Much more athletic than his bulk would suggest. Easy mover with greasy knees, loose hips and light feet that allow him to dance in and out of tight spaces like a slalom skier. Highly instinctive and trusts his eyes, immediately racing toward the ball whether in run support or in coverage, showing the confidence to bait quarterbacks as well as the closing speed to undercut targets to steal the ball.

Varies his strike zone as a tackler, showing no hesitation to take on bigger opponents high, as well as the strength to drag them to the ground on his own. Shows exceptional ball-skills for a defensive back with several highlight-reel worthy grabs on tape.

**WEAKNESSES:** Takes extremely aggressive — borderline reckless — angles to the ball and comes in so fast that he leaves himself vulnerable to cutbacks with some missed tackles on tape (Iowa State, Mississippi State). Strong enough to rip down college ball-carriers with arm tackles but possesses just an average wingspan for the position, limiting his tackle radius.

**Grade: 7.8**

## 6. JOHNATHAN ABRAM, Mississippi St.

5-11, 215 40 time: 4.55 2nd-3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Abram is a physical tone-setter with experience handling both safety positions. A starter as a freshman at Georgia before he made a stop in junior college before two years at Mississippi State, Abram is a proven commodity who should be able to compete for playing time early in his NFL career.

**STRENGTHS:** Shorter than ideal but possesses a physically-imposing frame with broad shoulders and good overall musculature. Aggressive tackler, especially in run support. Attacks the ball-carrier like a cannon ball, showing the ability to deliver bone-rattling hits and separate the football, forcing three fumbles over the 2017-18 seasons. Good agility for changing directions and accelerates fluidly, possessing enough raw speed and athleticism to handle NFL competition. Improved hands for the interception in 2018, picking off the first two passes of his FBS career (among 10 pass breakups).

**WEAKNESSES:** Runs hot and cold as a tackler, mostly owing to occasional lunges in an effort to deliver knockout hits, too often relying on the force he generates to knock down ball-carriers rather than wrapping his arms securely. A bit tentative in coverage. Attempts to read the eyes of the quarterback or the gait of the receiver and is too easily deked, proving vulnerable to play-action.

**Grade: 7.5**

## 7. JAQUAN JOHNSON, Miami

5-10, 190 40time: 4.50 2nd-3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Despite a memorable college career, Johnson lacks the bulk scouts would prefer at safety and was invited to the Senior Bowl specifically to gauge how he would handle nickel cornerback duties. Johnson has the athleticism, instincts and intangibles to handle the conversion and he should be able to contribute early in his NFL career.

He left Miami with 252 career tackles (including 7.5 for loss), with quite a track record of producing turnovers, intercepting eight passes, forcing six fumbles and recovering another three to earn second-team All-ACC honors as a junior and senior.

**STRENGTHS:** Short, but not small, with a powerful, compact frame. Fearless in traffic, plays with a junkyard dog mentality as a tackler and when fighting through blocks. A consistent, face-up tackler who does not back down to bigger ball-carriers, often bringing the contact to them. Productive on the blitz, showing timing, awareness and toughness.

Combines terrific awareness with legitimate playmaking chops, showing the courage to trust his eyes and anticipate where the ball is going, as well as soft hands and body control to turn errant passes into interceptions. Terrific body control and focus when the ball is in the air with several difficult interceptions to his credit. Off-the-chart intangibles.

**WEAKNESSES:** Although he plays bigger than his size, Johnson lacks ideal bulk for the position, especially when matched up against bigger slot receivers or tight ends. More quick than fast, excelling in coverage on short and intermediate routes but lacking ideal range for traditional single-high duties. Prone to over-aggression on play-action, firing up-field in run support only to have to scramble back, showing just average makeup speed when doing so.

**Grade: 7.4**

## 8. MARVELL TELL III, USC

6-2, 195 40 time: 4.50 3rd round

**IN OUR VIEW:** The Trojans' disappointing 2018 campaign might have contributed to Tell failing to build upon the first-team all-conference honors he earned as a junior. But given his raw tools and the importance of safeties in today's pass-happy NFL, don't be surprised if he still earns top 100 consideration, especially if he impresses at the Senior Bowl.

**STRENGTHS:** Has rare height for the position, as well as broad shoulders and long arms. A smooth, almost graceful runner who accelerates easily, showing the sideline-to-sideline range to handle true centerfield duties. Gears down well for a player of his size, showing enough agility to drop down and handle some man-to-man coverage responsibilities, as well as the bulk to match up against tight ends. Possesses the length and strength to make tackles even when not in ideal position.

**WEAKNESSES:** Can get himself in trouble once he turns his back to the passer, failing to locate the ball in the air quickly enough to take full advantage of his size. Is not as consistently physical as his size would indicate, either, too often stopping his feet and absorbing blows rather than delivering them. Can get lazy with his technique as a tackler, resorting to lunging and occasional ugly whiffs.

**Grade: 7.3**

## 9. MIKE BELL, Fresno State*

6-2, 203 40 time: 4.55 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Despite starting the past two seasons, Bell is still a moldable piece of clay, offering an intriguing skill-set that some teams will see as fitting best at safety and others at cornerback. He is a classic size/speed project who will likely cut his teeth in the NFL on special teams, but he possesses starter potential if he can develop greater consistency as a tackler and interceptor.

**STRENGTHS:** Looks the part of a NFL defensive back with broad shoulders, a tapered middle and long arms. Legitimate athlete, showing very good initial quickness, fluidity (played cornerback early on at Fresno State) and acceleration for a safety. Galloping strider that allows him to cover ground very quickly. Shows good instincts, recognizing route patterns and sneaking peeks back to the quarterback to anticipate where the ball is headed. Accomplished on special teams. Just turned 21.

**WEAKNESSES:** Too sporadic as an open-field tackler, lunging and failing to wrap up securely. Gets seduced by the lure of the big hit and looks to drop his shoulder into ball-carriers, giving them only half a defender to avoid. Uses his long arms to lasso

PHOTO BY KIM KLEMENT-USA TODAY SPORTS

ball-carriers outside of the grasp of many safeties but needs to show greater hand-eye coordination to finish the play, with ball-carriers too often able to step through his reach.

**Grade: 7.0**

### 10. JUAN THORNHILL, Virginia

6-0, 210 40 time: 4.53 4th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Thornhill did a little bit of everything during his Virginia career, starting out at cornerback, moving to safety as an upperclassman and lining up as a linebacker many times. This versatility will certainly intrigue the NFL (as will Thornhill's 12 career interceptions), which could push him into Day 2 if he is impressive in his pre-draft workouts.

**STRENGTHS:** Good-looking prospect with a prototypical blend of height, arm length and a tapered, athletic frame. Experience at cornerback shows in Thornhill's ease of movement and understanding of route development. Shows good initial quickness and agility, accelerating smoothly and topping out with at least enough speed for deep coverage duties. Best attribute may be his composure with the ball in the air. Tracks the ball like a receiver, showing soft hands to pluck the ball outside of his frame and excellent timing on his leaps. Should test very well.

**WEAKNESSES:** Thornhill will be viewed by some as a bit of a 'tweener as he lacks ideal straight-line speed and mobility for cornerback and is not as physical as scouts would prefer as a tackler for a traditional safety role. Thornhill is generally a drag-down tackler, lacking the stopping power as a hitter to intimidate over the middle or in run support.

**Grade: 6.9**

### 11. SHELDRICK REDWINE, Miami

6-0, 202 40 time: 4.58 4th-5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** While perhaps not as well-known as his two-time All-ACC teammate, safety Jaquan Johnson, Redwine was a standout, too, starting the past three seasons and finishing his career on a high note with a personal-best 64 tackles and three interceptions in 2018. Experienced at outside cornerback, nickel and safety, Redwine's versatility is sure to attract plenty of interest on Day 3.

**STRENGTHS:** Well-built defensive back with broad shoulders, long arms (32 3/8 inches) and a tapered middle with light feet. Lined up all over the field for Miami, showing the size, agility and awareness to play a similar role in the NFL. Good balance and burst out of his backpedal when lined up in man to man, showing the ability to explode forward to challenge underneath routes. Efficient transition out of his backpedal to run vertically, showing good speed for the position. Knack for producing turnovers with five interceptions, three forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries over the past two seasons.

**WEAKNESSES:** More of a jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none type than a true moveable chess piece. Read-and-react player who is too often caught flat-footed watching and waiting before attacking. Runs a bit hot and cold as a tackler. Sporadic strike zone, bouncing off some ball-carriers with heavy collisions or swiping at the legs and failing to wrap his arms.

**Grade: 6.0**

### 12. MARQUISE BLAIR, Utah

6-1, 195 40 time: 4.55 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Had relatively ho-hum numbers (59 tackles, two for loss, and two interceptions) as a senior, but Blair is an intriguing size/speed project who could be viewed as a safety, cornerback or perhaps even linebacker prospect depending on his NFL team, with his initial contribution likely coming on special teams. Versatility is this rangy athlete's greatest calling card.

**STRENGTHS:** Sports a tall, wiry frame with room for added muscular development. Long-strider who builds up to impressive speed, showing catch-up ability in pursuit and good range to handle deep coverage down the sideline. Takes his job as the last defender seriously, showing discipline in remaining deep, as well as generally reliable open-field tackling skills. Does a nice job of avoiding blocks near the line of scrimmage, showing his experience in traffic and sneaky athleticism to duck and slide by the trash to get in on the tackle.

**WEAKNESSES:** Questionable ball skills with just six PBUs (and two interceptions) in two seasons at the FBS level. Has a high-cut frame with very long legs that force Blair to gather himself a bit when changing directions, leaving him susceptible in coverage to shorter, more agile receivers. Requires a thorough medical evaluation with a history of knee issues going back to a torn meniscus in high school.

**Grade: 5.8**

### 13. WILL HARRIS, Boston College

6-1, 210 40 time: 4.62 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Harris is a bit of a throwback to a prior generation as a run-defending box safety. He was a four-year starter with 225 career tackles and five interceptions, earning third-team All-ACC honors in 2018 and an invitation to the Senior Bowl. While

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## SPOTLIGHT

## Taylor Rapp, Washington

**What is your favorite memory of playing at Washington?** I loved everything about my three years at the University of Washington, but the relationships I made with my teammates there will always be my favorite memory. Next to that, playing against Alabama my freshman year, a team that I grew up watching, a powerhouse program, was a tremendous experience.

**Are there players you model your game after? If so, who and why?** Earl Thomas. His intensity. His passion for the game. He plays the game the way it is meant to be played. His instincts are second to none. It is amazing how he diagnoses plays and his ability to cover so much ground is uncanny.

**What is your greatest asset as a football player?** I would say it would be preparation, football IQ and instincts on the field. I believe they all go hand-in-hand. Preparation is something Coach (Jimmy) Lake preaches in our DB room at UW. We have a slogan in our room — "Separation is in Preparation." Preparation is something that I also learned from guys like Budda Baker, Kevin King and Sidney Jones. Those guys took pride in preparation and helped me learn how to prepare and play like a pro.

**Take us into the film room for a moment... what are some of the "tells" you look for pre-snap in terms of alignment, the quarterback or receiver?** This is where the preparation comes in. We spend hours on film study each week to uncover the tendencies of our opponents. We look at everything from formation packages, route combinations, WR splits to how a QB goes through his reads, his shoulder positioning, and what his eyes are giving you or not giving you. It is all a "tell" and we want to pick those up. So in a game, when the No. 2 WR all of a sudden cuts down his split closer to the line, I know what route combination to expect and can communicate that to our 'backers and our secondary.

PHOTO BY SEAN BROWN/CSM VIA ZUMA WIRE (CAL SPORT MEDIA VIA AP IMAGES)

his production and experience should not be ignored, Harris' lack of speed and agility in coverage could be exposed by the precision passing and explosiveness he'll face in the NFL.

**STRENGTHS:** Looks the part of an NFL safety with an imposing frame. Plays to his size, routinely delivering physical hits and showing zero hesitation when fighting through the mass of humanity near the line of scrimmage. Strong enough to take on and shed blocks at the point of attack like a linebacker. While lacking top speed, Harris diagnoses the action quickly. Excellent intangibles. Voted a team captain in 2018.

**WEAKNESSES:** Possesses just average straight-line speed for the position, lacking the second gear to recover when beaten in coverage or in pursuit. Exacerbating the issue, Harris needs to show improved timing when diving at ball-carriers running away from him, too often failing to trip them up before they leave him in the dust. Sometimes appears satisfied with allowing the reception and making the hit, rather than going for the ball.

Grade: 5.7

### 14. MIKE EDWARDS, Kentucky

5-11, 200 40 time: 4.60 5th-6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** An All-SEC choice each of the past three seasons, few safeties enter the draft with more fanfare than Edwards. While his production speaks for itself, Edwards does not come with ideal size or speed, making it likely that he is still on the board on Day 3. Some believe his best fit in the NFL is at nickel cornerback.

**STRENGTHS:** Edward's proven track record against SEC competition is the real reason scouts are intrigued. A four-year starter, Edward racked up more than 300 tackles with 20-plus tackles for loss against the elite talent in college football, demonstrating the instincts, grit and versatility to handle the NFL jump. While shorter than ideal, Edwards is not small, surprising opponents with his physicality and core strength. He is a fearless run defender and shows good quickness in coverage.

**WEAKNESSES:** Better near the line of scrimmage than operating as the last line of defense. Comes in too hot as a tackler at times, flying in out of control and swiping at the legs of ball-carriers resulting in some highlight-reel stops but too many missed tackles. Gambling mentality also shows up in coverage, where Edwards can be fooled with double-moves; he lacks top recovery speed.

Grade: 5.6

### 15. UGOCHUKWU AMADI, Oregon

5-10, 201 40 time: 4.55 6th-7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** What Amadi lacks in size he more than makes up with instincts, ball-skills and athleticism. With all due respect to Oregon's talented front seven defenders — including projected 2019 draft picks Jalen Jelks and Justin Hollins — Amadi was clearly the Ducks' top defensive playmaker in 2018 when he took two of his three interceptions back for touchdowns while chipping in another on a punt return.

**STRENGTHS:** Sports a compact, athletic frame. Pitter-pat footwork and greasy joints make Amadi significantly quicker and better in coverage than most safeties, helping him shadow slot receivers and running backs in coverage. Good lateral agility and spatial awareness to dance past would-be blockers in tight quarters without sacrificing yardage. While Amadi may lack ideal size, he has proven durable, playing in all 51 games of his career at Oregon and earning the starting nod 34 times. Off-the-charts leadership, character.

**WEAKNESSES:** Lacks preferred height for the position. Quicker than fast, losing ground as the route continues downfield. Scrappy tackler who will occasionally surprise with his explosiveness but shows only average stopping power overall, too often making the tackle a yard or two after initial contact. May be relegated to nickel duties in the NFL due to his average height.

Grade: 5.4

## 3 TO WATCH

### SLEEPER

**Marquise Blair, Utah**
With less than eye-popping production over his career, Blair is virtually unknown outside of the Pac-12, but he boasts an intriguing combination of size and speed to suggest that his best football could be ahead of him.

### COULD DISAPPOINT

**Marvell Tell III, USC**
Tell is a "sometimes" player — sometimes he makes the play and sometimes he gives it up. Inconsistencies in coverage and tackling could get him in a coaches' doghouse quickly.

### SMALL SCHOOL STUD

**Nasir Adderley, Delaware**
The same instincts, athleticism and soft hands that helped Adderley get honored as a Buck Buchanan finalist as the best player in all the FCS showed up at the Senior Bowl, where the former cornerback stole the spotlight from other, more heralded safeties.

### 16. DARIUS WEST, Kentucky

6-0, 210 40 time: 4.55 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Fellow Kentucky safety Mike Edwards earned most of the attention over their respective careers, but West's splashy senior campaign and more intriguing athletic traits could make him more popular with scouts. West isn't an intimidating hitter, but he doesn't miss many tackles and has the range coveted in today's pass-happy NFL.

**STRENGTHS:** Boasts a solid frame for the position. Coordinated, light-footed athlete who shows an intriguing secondary burst when he needs it. Possesses the range to handle deep coverage duties as a single-high safety, accelerating smoothly to the sideline. Played his best ball as a senior (his second year as a starter) and might have untapped potential. He led the team in 2018 with three interceptions — all against SEC opponents in the second half of games.

**WEAKNESSES:** A read-and-react safety who doesn't always trust his eyes, perhaps due to the fact that he has just two years of starting experience. Tall in his backpedal and loses a step in his transition. Throttles down when he senses the ball is going away from him, too often lacking urgency in his play. Missed the 2016 season due to a knee injury (reportedly for torn ligaments).

Grade: 5.3

### 17. MALIK GANT, Marshall*

6-1, 200 40 time: 4.55 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Former walk-ons at Marshall rarely earn the attention of NFL scouts — especially those who decide to give up a year of eligibility to join the draft early — but the team willing to invest a Day 3 pick in Gant could get a handsome return. An instinctive, physical player who flies around the field like a heat-seeking missile, Gant has the look of an immediate helper on special teams with the potential to develop into much more.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses an above-average frame for the position, complete with broad shoulders, long limbs and a good overall musculature. Plays with a see-the-ball, get-the-ball mentality, showing very good diagnosis skills and the confidence to attack. Eager in run support, racing toward the line of scrimmage like he's skiing downhill. Shows intriguing spatial awareness and body control to make difficult tackles in the open field while running full speed, slicing the legs out from under ball-carriers.

**WEAKNESSES:** He's at his best facing the quarterback. Sneaks peeks back at the passer and can be manipulated by savvy quarterbacks, allowing himself to drift and losing his responsibility. Can get burned with his highly aggressive pursuit angles, especially when attacking downhill. Seems satisfied with knocking the ball out of the hands of receivers rather than competing for the interception.

Grade: 5.3

### 18. KHARI WILLIS, Michigan State

6-0, 215 40 time: 4.55 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** While perhaps lacking the elite athleticism of some of his peers, Willis checks boxes with his prototypical frame, physicality and intangibles. While speed is critical in today's NFL, tackling remains the single most important element on defense and Willis excels in that role.

**STRENGTHS:** Boasts an ideal frame for the position with plenty of natural body armor. Displays good initial quickness and balance when changing directions and is a smooth accelerator, showing at least passable straight-line speed for deep coverage. A savvy, instinctive defender rarely caught out of position. Willis' best attribute might be his reliability as a tackler. Voted a team captain in 2018.

**WEAKNESSES:** Looks like an undersized linebacker and, unfortunately, may prove to run like one, struggling to maintain position against some of the speedy receivers he came across in the Big Ten. Reliant upon diagnosing the action correctly as he simply does not possess the catch-up speed to recover when he guesses wrong.

Grade: 5.2

## WORTH WATCHING

**P.J. Locke III, Texas (5-11, 210)**
Versatile DB who thrived in nickel and safety roles for Longhorns.

**Saquan Hampton, Rutgers (6-0, 209)**
Combine invitee had strong week at East-West Shrine Game.

**Andrew Wingard, Wyoming (5-11, 209)**
Not a premier athlete but a hard-nosed safety who's going to fly around.

**D'Cota Dixon, Wisconsin (5-10, 198)**
A cerebral player and a workout warrior in the gym; noted for consistency.

**Lukas Denis, Boston College (5-11, 185)**
Lacks size, elite speed, but has extremely quick feet and plays a nice centerfield.

*For further analysis of the 2019 safeties, visit www.nfldraftscout.com.*

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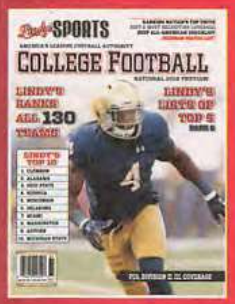

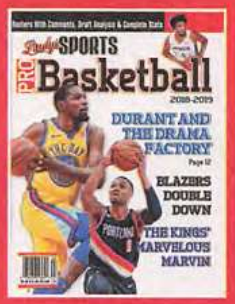

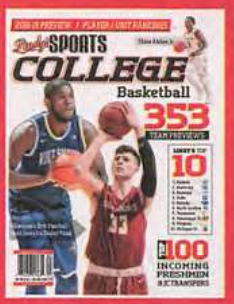

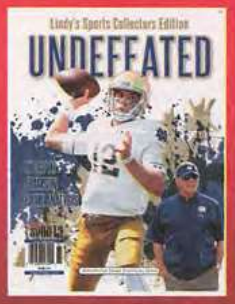

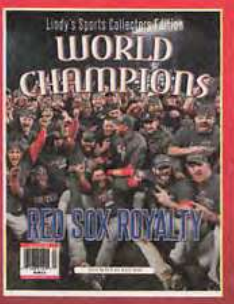

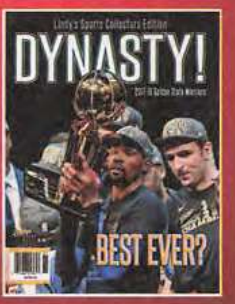


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# Specialists

## KICKERS

### 1. MATT GAY, Utah

6-0, 230 40 time: 5.20 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** A former college soccer player who walked on with the Utes during the preseason of 2017; by season's end, he become Utah's first Lou Groza Award winner and a consensus All-American. It was his first year kicking since 2011, when he played in high school.

Gay played two seasons of college soccer at Utah Valley University prior to Utah. He grew up with five brothers and two sisters and is no stranger to adversity, including having one of his brothers overdose twice on heroin — but he managed to stay alive. Gay is said to be a very easy-going with a laid-back personality, according to Utah head coach Kyle Whittingham. Gay had a strong week during the East-West Shrine Game practices and capped it off with a 47-yard field goal during the game.

Despite a limited body of work, his clutch performances in big spots and ability to connect from half of the football field make him a candidate to be the first specialist off the board.

**STRENGTHS:** Attributes his highly competitive spirit as one of the biggest reasons for his success. Nailed 5 of 6 field goal attempts of 50-plus yards in 2017, setting a school record for long-distance makes. He followed that up with 3 of 5 makes from beyond 50 yards as a senior. Hit a 51-yarder in the snow against Colorado in 2018; he also had makes from 31 yards and 33 yards in that game.

He has connected from beyond 60 yards on a regular basis in practice, and coaches swear he has the leg strength to make a 70-yarder. Did not miss an extra point attempt in his college career (85 for 85). Was voted a team captain for last season, despite being on the team for just one year.

**WEAKNESSES:** Can improve his kickoff strength, as 58 of his 82 kickoff attempts went for touchbacks. Has worked to improve his trajectory on kicks and has made it a point of emphasis to spend more time in the weight room. Limited experience could leave evaluators leery.

**Grade: 6.5**

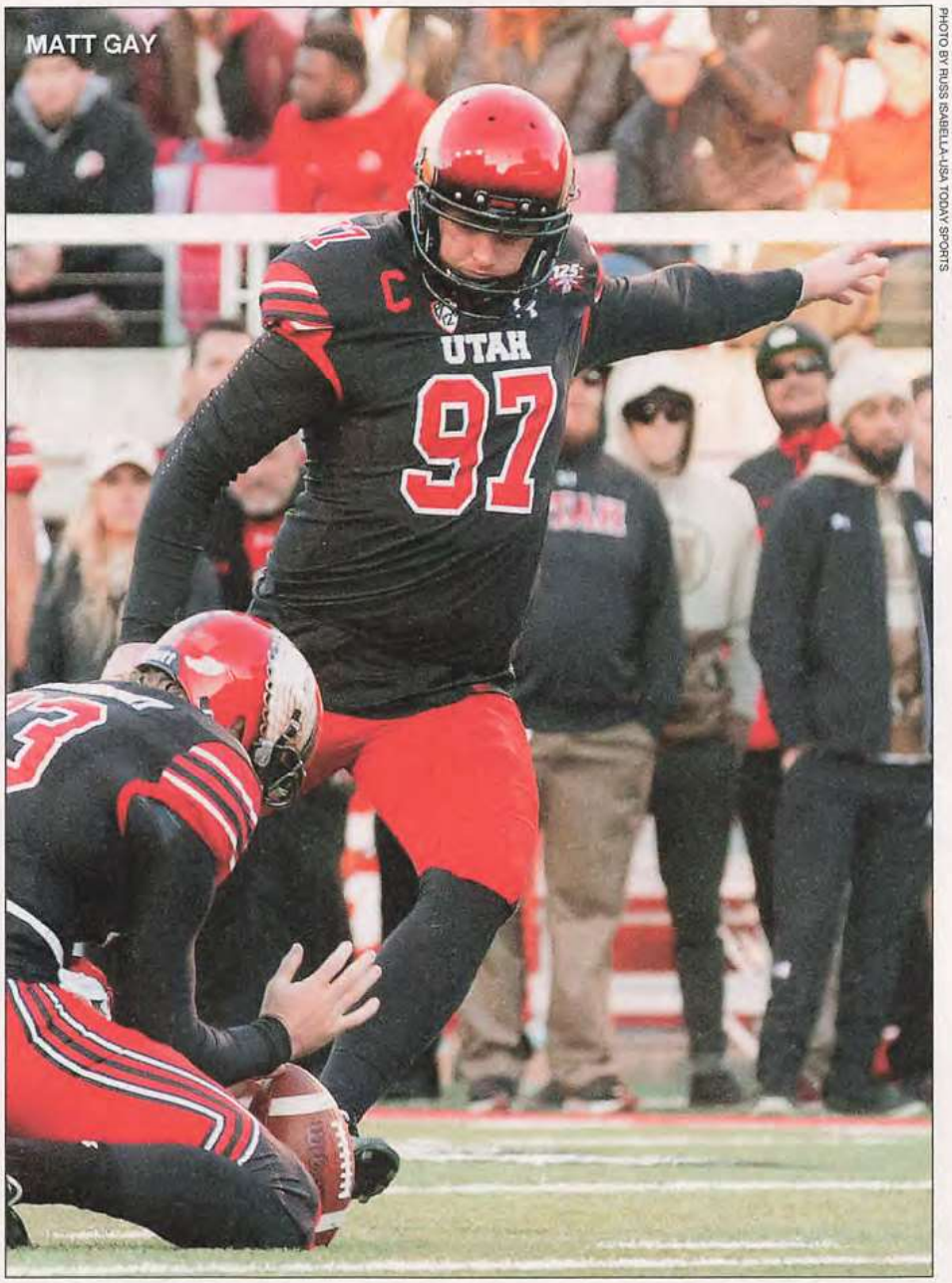



PHOTO BY RUSS ISABELLA-USA TODAY SPORTS

### 2. AUSTIN SEIBERT, Oklahoma

5-9, 209 40 time: 5.14 7th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** In a day and age where social media can get you recognized, Seibert went viral on YouTube, connecting on a 66-yard field goal in high school, which led to him receiving a scholarship at Oklahoma. He suffered a broken leg in high school but actually credits the setback for much of his success, stating that he lost all the muscle in his leg and re-trained it specifically just to kick.

Seibert became the highest-scoring kicker in FBS history during the final game of his collegiate career in the Orange Bowl, finishing with 499 career points (previous record held by Zane Gonzalez, who ended last season with the Arizona Cardinals). After a tremendous senior campaign, he was invited to the Senior Bowl, where he made a strong impression on scouts, setting himself up to hear his name called on Day 3 of the draft.

**STRENGTHS:** The multi-dimensional Seibert has done a remarkable job handling kickoff duties, extra points, field goals and punts throughout his four-year career. An outstanding kickoff specialist, he showed remarkably better leg strength as a senior, booming 91 of his 109 kickoffs for touchbacks. He did play

some linebacker in high school, so he's capable of making a tackle as the last line of defense; he made seven tackles during his time in Norman.

Was close to automatic as a senior, nailing 17 of 19 field goal attempts and showing fantastic accuracy. Has been steady on extra points with a 98.4 percent success rate in 315 career attempts (310 made). Averaged a respectable 41.7 yards per punt on 179 attempts and would be able to fill-in as punter, no problem. Has ice in his veins, according to teammates.

**WEAKNESSES:** Despite his 66-yard viral video, Seibert finished just 1 of 3 three from beyond 50-yards for his career with his longest coming from 51 yards. Endured a sophomore slump, missing some practice time in 2016 due to academic issues and went on to miss five field goals that season, including all three from beyond 40 yards. He had an embarrassing botched field goal attempt, which he performed a start and stop during his stride, leading to a "kick-six" in a loss to Houston.

**Grade: 6.1**

# PUNTERS

### 1. MITCH WISHNOWSKY, Utah

6-2, 219 40 time: 4.96 5th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Wishnowsky already has made a well-traveled journey. He dropped out of high school in Australia in order to pursue a career as a glazier for a company that specializes in glass installation. He came to the United States and began his career at Santa Barbara City College before transferring to Utah, making his mark at the Ray Guy Award winner in 2016.

A three-time All-Pac 12 selection, he had a highly decorated Utes career. He created a bit of a buzz for himself at the Senior Bowl, where his thunderous punts seemed to hang in the air forever. He was also credited by the Raiders coaching staff for being a high-energy guy throughout the week of practice and in meeting rooms.

The influx of Australian punters that has invaded the NFL in recent years only bodes well for his draft stock. It wouldn't be a shock for Wishnowsky's name to be called on Day 2.

**STRENGTHS:** A highly accurate directional punter who has built great strength in his kicking leg from his rugby days. Wishnowsky averaged 47.7 yards per punt as a sophomore, earning unanimous All-America honors. He finished with an impressive career punting average of 45.7 yards.

Has been a mentor to younger players on the team and has taken the time to work with the other specialists on their technique. Has also handled kickoff duties and was the holder for field goals and extra points.

**WEAKNESSES:** Struggled with shin splits due to his lack of conditioning early in his career. Played Australian rules football until he was 18 years old after suffering a series of shoulder injuries. Has hit the weight room more frequently in an attempt to continue to improve on his leg strength.

The coaching staff worried about him getting complacent. He admitted that the Senior Bowl hoopla proved to be a bit overwhelming for him, so the adjustment to a big-city media market could take some time. Will be a 27-year-old rookie.

**Grade: 6.4**

### 2. JAKE BAILEY, Stanford

6-1, 197 40 time: 4.90 6th round

**IN OUR VIEW:** Has been called a weapon by head coach David Shaw, who has praised Bailey for not trying to do too much and understanding that he doesn't have to try to crush it every time. Bailey was a second-team All-Pac-12 selection in 2017 with 45.4 yards per punt on 57 attempts; that average was first among Pac-12 players and seventh nationally. He followed that up with a 44.0-yard average in 2018.

Bailey went on to set off a series of booming attempts throughout the week in Mobile during Senior Bowl practices and looked every bit the part of an NFL punter, showing why he projects as a Day 3 prospect.

**STRENGTHS:** Possesses a smooth, compact punting delivery, along with great leg strength and leg speed. Does an exceptional job pinning opponents inside the 10-yard line, utilizing his angle and backspin techniques. Holds a career punting average of 43.8 on 185 attempts. Was a solid defensive back/wide receiver and return man in high school, so he does own better athleticism than most punters, a plus on fakes. He also holds the long jump record at Santa Fe Christian with a mark of 21 feet, 4 inches.

A smart player who has graduated from Stanford and has strong off-the-field ambitions (which might be a plus or minus for the NFL). He once interned in the office of former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, a member of the Stanford faculty. And he is also working on his pilot license and enjoys flying planes recreationally.

**WEAKNESSES:** Has worked on placing the ball closer to the sidelines and leaving a narrow area of space for returners, in addition to being more consistent with his hang time. Has handled kickoff responsibilities all four years during his time at Stanford but had his responsibilities cut down last year with just five attempts (four touchbacks).

**Grade: 6.2**

JAKE BAILEY

PHOTO BY AP PHOTO/CARLOS OSORIO

# THE 2018 DRAFT — TEAM-BY-TEAM

## ARIZONA CARDINALS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 10 | From Oak | Josh Rosen | QB | 6-4 | 218 | UCLA |
| 2 | 47 | | Christian Kirk | WR | 5-11 | 200 | Texas A&M |
| 3 | 97 | | Mason Cole | C/G | 6-5 | 307 | Michigan |
| 4 | 134 | | Chase Edmonds | RB | 5-9 | 205 | Fordham |
| 6 | 182 | From Den | Chris Campbell | CB | 6-1 | 195 | Penn State |
| 7 | 254 | | Korey Cunningham | T | 6-6 | 311 | Cincinnati |

## ATLANTA FALCONS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 26 | | Calvin Ridley | WR | 6-1 | 190 | Alabama |
| 2 | 58 | | Isaiah Oliver | CB | 6-0 | 210 | Colorado |
| 3 | 90 | | Deadrin Senat | DT | 6-0 | 314 | South Florida |
| 4 | 126 | | Ito Smith | RB | 5-9 | 195 | Southern Mississippi |
| 6 | 194 | From LAR | Russell Gage | WR | 6-0 | 184 | LSU |
| 6 | 200 | | Foyesade Oluokun | LB | 6-2 | 229 | Yale |

## BALTIMORE RAVENS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 25 | From Ten | Hayden Hurst | TE | 6-3 | 250 | South Carolina |
| 1 | 32 | From Phi | Lamar Jackson | QB | 6-3 | 216 | Louisville |
| 3 | 83 | | Orlando Brown Jr. | T | 6-8 | 345 | Oklahoma |
| 3 | 86 | From KC | Mark Andrews | TE | 6-4 | 256 | Oklahoma |
| 4 | 118 | | Anthony Averett | CB | 5-11 | 183 | Alabama |
| 4 | 122 | From KC | Kenny Young | LB | 6-1 | 240 | UCLA |
| 4 | 132 | From Phi | Jaleel Scott | WR | 6-5 | 215 | New Mexico State |
| 5 | 162 | From Ten | Jordan Lasley | WR | 6-1 | 205 | UCLA |
| 6 | 190 | | DeShon Elliott | S | 6-2 | 210 | Texas |
| 6 | 212 | From Oak | Greg Senat | T | 6-8 | 305 | Wagner |
| 6 | 215 | From Ten | Bradley Bozeman | C | 6-3 | 320 | Alabama |
| 7 | 238 | | Zach Sieler | DT | 6-6 | 290 | Ferris State |

## BUFFALO BILLS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 7 | From TB | Josh Allen | QB | 6-5 | 237 | Wyoming |
| 1 | 16 | From Bal | Tremaine Edmunds | LB | 6-5 | 250 | Virginia Tech |
| 3 | 96 | From Phi | Harrison Phillips | DT | 6-3 | 307 | Stanford |
| 4 | 121 | | Taron Johnson | CB | 5-11 | 192 | Weber State |
| 5 | 154 | From Bal | Siran Neal | LB | 6-0 | 206 | Jacksonville State |
| 5 | 166 | From Jax | Wyatt Teller | G | 6-4 | 314 | Virginia Tech |
| 6 | 187 | From Cin | Ray-Ray McCloud III | WR | 5-9 | 190 | Clemson |
| 7 | 255 | From TB | Austin Proehl | WR | 5-10 | 175 | North Carolina |

## CAROLINA PANTHERS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 24 | | DJ Moore | WR | 6-0 | 210 | Maryland |
| 2 | 55 | | Donte Jackson | CB | 5-10 | 180 | LSU |
| 3 | 85 | From Buf | Rashaan Gaulden | S | 6-1 | 200 | Tennessee |
| 4 | 101 | From GB | Ian Thomas | TE | 6-4 | 260 | Indiana |
| 4 | 136 | From LAR | Marquis Haynes | DE | 6-2 | 235 | Mississippi |
| 5 | 161 | | Jermaine Carter Jr. | LB | 6-1 | 225 | Maryland |
| 7 | 234 | From Buf | Andre Smith | LB | 6-0 | 240 | North Carolina |
| 7 | 242 | | Kendrick Norton | DT | 6-3 | 315 | Miami |

## CHICAGO BEARS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 8 | | Roquan Smith | LB | 6-1 | 225 | Georgia |
| 2 | 39 | | James Daniels | G/C | 6-4 | 295 | Iowa |
| 2 | 51 | From NE | Anthony Miller | WR | 5-11 | 190 | Memphis |
| 4 | 115 | From Arz | Joel Iyiegbuniwe | LB | 6-1 | 230 | Western Kentucky |
| 5 | 145 | | Bilal Nichols | DT | 6-4 | 290 | Delaware |
| 6 | 181 | | Kylie Fitts | LB | 6-4 | 260 | Utah |
| 7 | 224 | | Javon Wims | WR | 6-4 | 215 | Georgia |

## CINCINNATI BENGALS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 21 | From Buf | Billy Price | OL | 6-4 | 305 | Ohio State |
| 2 | 54 | From KC | Jessie Bates III | S | 6-1 | 200 | Wake Forest |
| 3 | 77 | | Sam Hubbard | DE | 6-5 | 270 | Ohio State |
| 3 | 78 | From KC | Malik Jefferson | LB | 6-2 | 236 | Texas |
| 4 | 112 | | Mark Walton | RB | 5-10 | 202 | Miami |
| 5 | 151 | | Davontae Harris | CB | 5-11 | 205 | Illinois State |
| 5 | 158 | From Buf | Andrew Brown | DT | 6-3 | 296 | Virginia |
| 5 | 170 | | Darius Phillips | CB | 5-10 | 193 | Western Michigan |
| 7 | 249 | From NE | Logan Woodside | QB | 6-1 | 213 | Toledo |
| 7 | 252 | | Rod Taylor | G | 6-3 | 320 | Mississippi |
| 7 | 253 | | Auden Tate | WR | 6-5 | 228 | Florida State |

## CLEVELAND BROWNS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | | Baker Mayfield | QB | 6-1 | 215 | Oklahoma |
| 1 | 4 | From Hou | Denzel Ward | CB | 5-10 | 190 | Ohio State |
| 2 | 33 | | Austin Corbett | G/T | 6-4 | 306 | Nevada |
| 2 | 35 | From Hou | Nick Chubb | RB | 5-11 | 227 | Georgia |
| 3 | 67 | From Ind | Chad Thomas | DE | 6-5 | 278 | Miami |
| 4 | 105 | From NE | Antonio Callaway | WR | 5-11 | 200 | Florida |
| 5 | 150 | From GB | Genard Avery | LB | 6-0 | 250 | Memphis |
| 6 | 175 | | Damion Ratley | WR | 6-1 | 200 | Texas A&M |
| 6 | 188 | From Was | Simeon Thomas | CB | 6-3 | 190 | Louisiana |

## DALLAS COWBOYS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 19 | | Leighton Vander Esch | LB | 6-4 | 256 | Boise State |
| 2 | 50 | | Connor Williams | G/T | 6-5 | 298 | Texas |
| 3 | 81 | | Michael Gallup | WR | 6-1 | 198 | Colorado State |
| 4 | 116 | | Dorance Armstrong | DE | 6-3 | 259 | Kansas |
| 4 | 137 | | Dalton Schultz | TE | 6-5 | 244 | Stanford |
| 5 | 171 | | Mike White | QB | 6-4 | 224 | Western Kentucky |
| 6 | 193 | | Chris Covington | LB | 6-2 | 245 | Indiana |
| 6 | 208 | | Cedrick Wilson | WR | 6-2 | 197 | Boise State |
| 7 | 236 | | Bo Scarbrough | RB | 6-2 | 228 | Alabama |

## DENVER BRONCOS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 5 | | Bradley Chubb | LB | 6-4 | 275 | North Carolina State |
| 2 | 40 | | Courtland Sutton | WR | 6-4 | 216 | SMU |
| 3 | 71 | | Royce Freeman | RB | 6-0 | 238 | Oregon |
| 3 | 99 | | Isaac Yiadom | CB | 6-1 | 190 | Boston College |
| 4 | 106 | | Josey Jewell | LB | 6-2 | 236 | Iowa |
| 4 | 113 | From Was | DaeSean Hamilton | WR | 6-1 | 206 | Penn State |
| 5 | 156 | From Sea | Troy Fumagalli | TE | 6-6 | 248 | Wisconsin |
| 6 | 183 | From LAR | Sam Jones | C/G | 6-5 | 290 | Arizona State |
| 6 | 217 | From LAR | Keishawn Bierria | LB | 6-1 | 223 | Washington |
| 7 | 226 | From Sea | David Williams | RB | 6-1 | 229 | Arkansas |

## DETROIT LIONS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 20 | | Frank Ragnow | C | 6-5 | 308 | Arkansas |
| 2 | 43 | From NE | Kerryon Johnson | RB | 5-11 | 206 | Auburn |
| 3 | 82 | | Tracy Walker | S | 6-1 | 206 | Louisiana-Lafayette |
| 4 | 114 | From NE | Da'Shawn Hand | DE | 6-3 | 297 | Alabama |
| 5 | 153 | | Tyrell Crosby | T | 6-4 | 309 | Oregon |
| 7 | 237 | | Nick Bawden | FB | 6-2 | 245 | San Diego State |

## GREEN BAY PACKERS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 18 | From Sea | Jaire Alexander | CB | 5-11 | 190 | Louisville |
| 2 | 45 | | Josh Jackson | CB | 6-0 | 190 | Iowa |
| 3 | 88 | From Car | Oren Burks | LB | 6-3 | 235 | Vanderbilt |
| 4 | 133 | | J'Mon Moore | WR | 6-3 | 205 | Missouri |
| 5 | 138 | From Cle | Cole Madison | G | 6-5 | 308 | Washington State |
| 5 | 172 | | JK Scott | P | 6-5 | 208 | Alabama |
| 5 | 174 | | Marquez Valdes-Scantling | WR | 6-4 | 206 | South Florida |
| 6 | 207 | | Equanimeous St. Brown | WR | 6-5 | 214 | Notre Dame |
| 7 | 232 | | James Looney | DE | 6-2 | 287 | California |
| 7 | 239 | From Buf | Hunter Bradley | LS | 6-2 | 241 | Mississippi State |
| 7 | 248 | From Sea | Kendall Donnerson | LB | 6-3 | 249 | Southeast Missouri St. |

## HOUSTON TEXANS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 68 | | Justin Reid | S | 6-1 | 210 | Stanford |
| 3 | 80 | From Sea | Martinas Rankin | T | 6-4 | 310 | Mississippi State |
| 3 | 98 | | Jordan Akins | TE | 6-3 | 250 | Central Florida |
| 4 | 103 | | Keke Coutee | WR | 5-10 | 180 | Texas Tech |
| 6 | 177 | | Duke Ejiofor | LB | 6-3 | 265 | Wake Forest |
| 6 | 211 | | Jordan Thomas | TE | 6-6 | 265 | Mississippi State |
| 6 | 214 | | Peter Kalambayi | LB | 6-3 | 250 | Stanford |
| 7 | 222 | | Jermaine Kelly Jr. | CB | 6-1 | 195 | San Jose State |

## INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 6 | From NYJ | Quenton Nelson | G | 6-5 | 325 | Notre Dame |
| 2 | 36 | | Darius Leonard | LB | 6-2 | 234 | South Carolina State |
| 2 | 37 | From NYJ | Braden Smith | G | 6-6 | 315 | Auburn |
| 2 | 52 | From Phi | Kemoko Turay | DE | 6-5 | 253 | Rutgers |
| 2 | 64 | From Cle | Tyquan Lewis | DE | 6-3 | 269 | Ohio State |
| 4 | 104 | | Nyheim Hines | RB | 5-8 | 198 | North Carolina State |
| 5 | 159 | From Oak | Daurice Fountain | WR | 6-1 | 210 | Northern Iowa |
| 5 | 169 | From Phi | Jordan Wilkins | RB | 6-1 | 216 | Mississippi |
| 6 | 185 | From Oak | Deon Cain | WR | 6-2 | 202 | Clemson |
| 7 | 221 | | Matthew Adams | LB | 6-1 | 237 | Houston |
| 7 | 235 | From NYJ | Zaire Franklin | LB | 6-0 | 238 | Syracuse |

## JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 29 | | Taven Bryan | DT | 6-5 | 291 | Florida |
| 2 | 61 | | DJ Chark | WR | 6-4 | 198 | LSU |
| 3 | 93 | | Ronnie Harrison | S | 6-2 | 207 | Alabama |
| 4 | 129 | | Will Richardson | T | 6-6 | 306 | North Carolina State |
| 6 | 203 | | Tanner Lee | QB | 6-4 | 218 | Nebraska |
| 7 | 230 | From Cin | Leon Jacobs | LB | 6-1 | 246 | Wisconsin |
| 7 | 247 | | Logan Cooke | P | 6-5 | 230 | Mississippi State |

## KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 46 | From Cin | Breeland Speaks | LB | 6-3 | 285 | Mississippi |
| 3 | 75 | From Bal | Derrick Nnadi | NT | 6-1 | 312 | Florida State |
| 3 | 100 | From Cin | Dorian O'Daniel | LB | 6-1 | 220 | Clemson |
| 4 | 124 | From LAR | Armani Watts | S | 5-11 | 205 | Texas A&M |
| 6 | 196 | | Tremon Smith | CB | 6-0 | 190 | Central Arkansas |
| 6 | 198 | From NE | Kahlil McKenzie | G | 6-3 | 320 | Tennessee |

## LOS ANGELES CHARGERS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 17 | | Derwin James | S | 6-2 | 215 | Florida State |
| 2 | 48 | | Uchenna Nwosu | LB | 6-2 | 251 | USC |
| 3 | 84 | | Justin Jones | DT | 6-3 | 309 | North Carolina State |
| 4 | 119 | | Kyzir White | LB | 6-2 | 218 | West Virginia |
| 5 | 155 | | Scott Quessenberry | C/G | 6-4 | 310 | UCLA |
| 6 | 191 | | Dylan Cantrell | WR | 6-3 | 226 | Texas Tech |
| 7 | 251 | | Justin Jackson | RB | 6-0 | 199 | Northwestern |

## LOS ANGELES RAMS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 89 | From Oak | Joseph Noteboom | T | 6-5 | 309 | Texas Christian |
| 4 | 111 | From Mia | Brian Allen | C | 6-2 | 302 | Michigan State |
| 4 | 135 | From NYG | John Franklin-Myers | DE | 6-4 | 283 | Stephen F. Austin |
| 5 | 147 | From Car | Micah Kiser | LB | 6-0 | 238 | Virginia |
| 5 | 160 | From Den | Ogbonnia Okoronkwo | LB | 6-2 | 253 | Oklahoma |
| 6 | 176 | From NYG | John Kelly | RB | 5-10 | 216 | Tennessee |
| 6 | 192 | From Dal | Jamil Demby | G | 6-5 | 319 | Maine |
| 6 | 195 | From Buf | Sebastian Joseph | NT | 6-4 | 305 | Rutgers |
| 6 | 205 | From Was | Trevon Young | LB | 6-4 | 258 | Louisville |
| 7 | 231 | From Was | Travin Howard | S | 6-1 | 213 | Texas Christian |
| 7 | 244 | From Atl | Justin Lawler | DE | 6-4 | 262 | SMU |

## MIAMI DOLPHINS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 11 | | Minkah Fitzpatrick | S | 6-1 | 202 | Alabama |
| 2 | 42 | | Mike Gesicki | TE | 6-6 | 252 | Penn State |
| 3 | 73 | | Jerome Baker | LB | 6-1 | 225 | Ohio State |
| 4 | 123 | From Cle | Durham Smythe | TE | 6-6 | 257 | Notre Dame |
| 4 | 131 | From Phi | Kalen Ballage | RB | 6-3 | 230 | Arizona State |
| 6 | 209 | From LAR | Cornell Armstrong | CB | 5-11 | 180 | Southern Mississippi |
| 7 | 227 | From SF | Quentin Poling | LB | 6-0 | 235 | Ohio |
| 7 | 229 | | Jason Sanders | K | 5-11 | 186 | New Mexico |

## MINNESOTA VIKINGS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 30 | | Mike Hughes | CB | 5-10 | 189 | Central Florida |
| 2 | 62 | | Brian O'Neill | T | 6-7 | 297 | Pittsburgh |
| 4 | 102 | From TB | Jalyn Holmes | DE | 6-5 | 283 | Ohio State |
| 5 | 157 | From NYJ | Tyler Conklin | TE | 6-3 | 254 | Central Michigan |
| 5 | 167 | From NYJ | Daniel Carlson | K | 6-5 | 213 | Auburn |
| 6 | 213 | | Colby Gossett | G | 6-5 | 311 | Appalachian State |
| 6 | 218 | | Ade Aruna | DE | 6-5 | 263 | Tulane |
| 7 | 225 | From NYJ | Devante Downs | LB | 6-2 | 252 | California |

## NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 23 | From LAR | Isaiah Wynn | T/G | 6-2 | 302 | Georgia |
| 1 | 31 | | Sony Michel | RB | 5-11 | 215 | Georgia |
| 2 | 56 | From TB | Duke Dawson | CB | 5-10 | 202 | Florida |
| 5 | 143 | From SF | Ja'Whaun Bentley | LB | 6-2 | 260 | Purdue |
| 6 | 178 | From Cle | Christian Sam | LB | 6-2 | 237 | Arizona State |
| 6 | 210 | From Oak | Braxton Berrios | WR | 5-9 | 183 | Miami |
| 7 | 219 | From Cle | Danny Etling | QB | 6-3 | 215 | LSU |
| 7 | 243 | From KC | Keion Crossen | CB | 5-10 | 180 | Western Carolina |
| 7 | 250 | From Phi | Ryan Izzo | TE | 6-5 | 256 | Florida State |

## NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 14 | From GB | Marcus Davenport | DE | 6-6 | 265 | Texas-San Antonio |
| 3 | 91 | | Tre'Quan Smith | WR | 6-2 | 203 | Central Florida |
| 4 | 127 | | Rick Leonard | T | 6-7 | 311 | Florida State |
| 5 | 164 | | Natrell Jamerson | CB | 6-0 | 198 | Wisconsin |
| 6 | 189 | From Arz | Kamrin Moore | DB | 5-11 | 200 | Boston College |
| 6 | 201 | | Boston Scott | RB | 5-7 | 195 | Louisiana Tech |
| 7 | 245 | | Will Clapp | C/G | 6-5 | 311 | LSU |

## NEW YORK GIANTS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | | Saquon Barkley | RB | 6-0 | 230 | Penn State |
| 2 | 34 | | Will Hernandez | G | 6-2 | 327 | Texas-El Paso |
| 3 | 66 | | Lorenzo Carter | LB | 6-5 | 250 | Georgia |
| 3 | 69 | From TB | B.J. Hill | DT | 6-3 | 311 | North Carolina State |
| 4 | 108 | From TB | Kyle Lauletta | QB | 6-2 | 222 | Richmond |
| 5 | 139 | | RJ McIntosh | DT | 6-4 | 293 | Miami |

## NEW YORK JETS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 3 | From Ind | Sam Darnold | QB | 6-3 | 225 | USC |
| 3 | 72 | | Nathan Shepherd | DE | 6-4 | 315 | Fort Hays State |
| 4 | 107 | | Christopher Herndon IV | TE | 6-4 | 253 | Miami |
| 6 | 179 | | Parry Nickerson | CB | 5-10 | 182 | Tulane |
| 6 | 180 | From Min | Folorunso Fatukasi | DT | 6-4 | 318 | Connecticut |
| 6 | 204 | From Min | Trenton Cannon | RB | 5-11 | 185 | Virginia State |

## OAKLAND RAIDERS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 15 | From Arz | Kolton Miller | T | 6-8 | 309 | UCLA |
| 2 | 57 | From Ten | P.J. Hall | DT | 6-1 | 308 | Sam Houston State |
| 3 | 65 | From Bal | Brandon Parker | T | 6-8 | 305 | North Carolina A&T |
| 3 | 87 | From LAR | Arden Key | LB | 6-5 | 238 | LSU |
| 4 | 110 | | Nick Nelson | CB | 5-11 | 200 | Wisconsin |
| 5 | 140 | From Ind | Maurice Hurst | DT | 6-1 | 291 | Michigan |
| 5 | 173 | From Dal | Johnny Townsend | P | 6-1 | 210 | Florida |
| 6 | 216 | | Azeem Victor | LB | 6-2 | 240 | Washington |
| 7 | 228 | | Marcell Ateman | WR | 6-4 | 216 | Oklahoma State |

## PHILADELPHIA EAGLES

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 49 | From Ind | Dallas Goedert | TE | 6-5 | 256 | South Dakota State |
| 4 | 125 | From Bal | Avonte Maddox | CB | 5-9 | 184 | Pittsburgh |
| 4 | 130 | From Min | Josh Sweat | DE | 6-5 | 251 | Florida State |
| 6 | 206 | | Matt Pryor | T/G | 6-7 | 332 | Texas Christian |
| 7 | 233 | From NE | Jordan Mailata | T | 6-8 | 346 | None |

## PITTSBURGH STEELERS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 28 | | Terrell Edmunds | S | 6-1 | 217 | Virginia Tech |
| 2 | 60 | | James Washington | WR | 5-11 | 213 | Oklahoma State |
| 3 | 76 | From Sea | Mason Rudolph | QB | 6-5 | 235 | Oklahoma State |
| 3 | 92 | | Chukwuma Okorafor | T | 6-6 | 320 | Western Michigan |
| 5 | 148 | From SF | Marcus Allen | S | 6-2 | 215 | Penn State |
| 5 | 165 | | Jaylen Samuels | TE | 6-0 | 225 | North Carolina State |
| 7 | 246 | | Joshua Frazier | DT | 6-3 | 321 | Alabama |

## SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 9 | | Mike McGlinchey | T | 6-8 | 315 | Notre Dame |
| 2 | 44 | From Was | Dante Pettis | WR | 6-1 | 195 | Washington |
| 3 | 70 | From Chi | Fred Warner | LB | 6-3 | 236 | Brigham Young |
| 3 | 95 | From NE | Tarvarius Moore | CB | 6-2 | 193 | Southern Mississippi |
| 4 | 128 | From Pit | Kentavius Street | DE | 6-2 | 287 | North Carolina State |
| 5 | 142 | From Was | D.J. Reed | CB | 5-9 | 188 | Kansas State |
| 6 | 184 | | Marcell Harris | S | 6-0 | 208 | Florida |
| 7 | 223 | From Mia | Jullian Taylor | DT | 6-5 | 280 | Temple |
| 7 | 240 | From KC | Richie James | WR | 5-9 | 176 | Middle Tennessee |

## SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 27 | From GB | Rashaad Penny | RB | 5-11 | 220 | San Diego State |
| 3 | 79 | From Pit | Rasheem Green | DT | 6-4 | 275 | USC |
| 4 | 120 | | Will Dissly | TE | 6-4 | 265 | Washington |
| 5 | 141 | From Hou | Shaquem Griffin | LB | 6-0 | 227 | Central Florida |
| 5 | 146 | From Oak | Tre Flowers | CB | 6-3 | 203 | Oklahoma State |
| 5 | 149 | From Den | Michael Dickson | P | 6-2 | 208 | Texas |
| 5 | 168 | From NE | Jamarco Jones | T | 6-4 | 300 | Ohio State |
| 6 | 186 | From GB | Jacob Martin | DE | 6-2 | 236 | Temple |
| 7 | 220 | From Pit | Alex McGough | QB | 6-3 | 214 | Florida International |

## TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 12 | From Buf | Vita Vea | DT | 6-4 | 347 | Washington |
| 2 | 38 | | Ronald Jones II | RB | 5-11 | 208 | USC |
| 2 | 53 | From Buf | M.J. Stewart | CB | 5-11 | 200 | North Carolina |
| 2 | 63 | From NE | Carlton Davis | CB | 6-1 | 206 | Auburn |
| 3 | 94 | From Min | Alex Cappa | G | 6-6 | 305 | Humboldt State |
| 4 | 117 | From NE | Jordan Whitehead | S | 5-10 | 198 | Pittsburgh |
| 5 | 144 | | Justin Watson | WR | 6-3 | 215 | Pennsylvania |
| 6 | 202 | From Pit | Jack Cichy | LB | 6-2 | 238 | Wisconsin |

## TENNESSEE TITANS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 22 | From Bal | Rashaan Evans | LB | 6-2 | 232 | Alabama |
| 2 | 41 | From Oak | Harold Landry | LB | 6-2 | 252 | Boston College |
| 5 | 152 | From Bal | Dane Cruikshank | S | 6-1 | 209 | Arizona |
| 6 | 199 | | Luke Falk | QB | 6-4 | 215 | Washington State |

## WASHINGTON REDSKINS

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 13 | | Da'Ron Payne | NT | 6-3 | 311 | Alabama |
| 2 | 59 | From SF | Derrius Guice | RB | 5-11 | 224 | LSU |
| 3 | 74 | From SF | Geron Christian | T/G | 6-5 | 298 | Louisville |
| 4 | 109 | From Den | Troy Apke | S | 6-1 | 200 | Penn State |
| 5 | 163 | From Den | Tim Settle | NT | 6-3 | 329 | Virginia Tech |
| 6 | 197 | From LAR | Shaun Dion Hamilton | LB | 6-0 | 228 | Alabama |
| 7 | 241 | From LAR | Greg Stroman | CB | 5-11 | 182 | Virginia Tech |
| 7 | 256 | From LAR | Trey Quinn | WR | 6-0 | 203 | SMU |

# Arizona Cardinals

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 241.6 (32nd)
**RUSHING:** 83.9 (32nd)
**PASSING:** 157.7 (32nd)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 358.8 (20th)
**RUSHING:** 154.9 (32nd)
**PASSING:** 203.9 (4th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

The Cardinals have had their share of finds during Steve Keim's tenure as general manager, most notably players such as running back David Johnson, safety Deone Bucannon, edge rusher Markus Golden, safety Budda Baker and this past year's crop of draft picks. But he will be held accountable for not identifying nearly enough capable finds among offensive linemen and for failing to even draft enough of them. He's only selected seven of them in the last five years and the Cardinals released four. If it turns out he chose correctly on Rosen then all sins will likely be forgiven.

**Best pick:** RB David Johnson, R3 2015 — Though he didn't look the same this past season after missing virtually all of 2017 with a wrist injury, Johnson earned himself a contract extension and remains the team's most versatile and dynamic offensive threat.

**Worst pick:** DT Robert Nkemdiche, R1 2016 — What everyone thought was a steal has thus far turned out to be a bust. Nkemdiche can't stay healthy, his passion for football clearly is questionable and there are major concerns about his drive and attention span.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 7 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 6 |
| STARTERS | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 3 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Following two straight non-winning seasons and then having to replace a retiring Bruce Arians as head coach, the Cardinals went in an entirely different direction with defensive-minded Steve Wilks as their new coach and that proved to be a disaster in 2018.

They finished an embarrassing 3-13, tied with the 2000 team for the worst record ever in Arizona history, and it wound up costing Wilks his job after only one season with the franchise. Quarterback Sam Bradford, who was benched late in a Week 3 loss to the Bears, was ultimately given his release and the team also parted ways with offensive coordinator Mike McCoy at midseason.

Cardinals president Michael Bidwill saw enough after a 2-6 start that he began calling friends around the league asking for help in what eventually would become a coaching search that landed Kliff Kingsbury, the former head coach at Texas Tech and recent offensive coordinator at USC.

The Cardinals' defense, which had been a top-five-ranked unit each of the previous three seasons, finished 20th overall and was also last in the league against the run as Wilks changed the scheme from a 3-4 base to a 4-3 without really having the proper talent on the field to make it work.

The Cardinals will switch back to a 3-4 defense in 2019, according to both Bidwill and general manager Steve Keim.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Josh Rosen**
**Backup:** Mike Glennon

Bradford was hugely ineffective after being coddled throughout the offseason, training camp and the preseason because of his wobbly knee and upon being replaced by Rosen, ultimately was given his release. Rosen had his moments, but largely was a disappointment in that he continued to struggle with accuracy and keeping his eyes downfield. He didn't find a groove that would allow him to sustain any real forward progress and wound up getting sacked and hit far more times than he should have because of play-calling and the lack of even an average offensive line. Glennon would end up relieving him in mop-up duty during a couple of late-season routs where the Cardinals got destroyed and he actually played well under the circumstances.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: David Johnson, Derrick Coleman (UFA)**
**Backups:** Chase Edmonds, T.J. Logan, *D.J. Foster

Johnson was completely healthy after missing the entire 2017 season following a broken wrist, but he never returned to 2016 form when he led the league in yards from scrimmage and touchdowns scored and was named a first-team All-Pro. Part of the problem had to do with the offensive line, but Johnson also wasn't put in enough good positions to utilize his versatile skills as a pass-catcher and as a result, he finished with only 940 rushing yards and 446 receiving yards. Coleman was rarely utilized in what was supposed to be a healthy two-back set and was largely a disappointment not of his own doing. Edmonds wasn't really integrated into the game plan until the second half of the season.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Ricky Seals-Jones (UFA)**
**Backups:** Jermaine Gresham, John Phillips (UFA), Darrell Daniels (UFA)

The Cardinals expected a lot more out of this position, but they got next to nothing out of it. Seals-Jones had a brutal sophomore season in which he only caught 34 passes for 343 yards and one touchdown. Gresham regressed and could be released. The whole unit needs an overhaul with Phillips and Daniels expected to test free agency. Then again, it's not like the Cardinals have ever relied on their collection of tight ends over the years.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Larry Fitzgerald (UFA), Chad Williams**
**Backups:** *Christian Kirk, J.J. Nelson (UFA), Trent Sherfield, Pharoh Cooper, Jalen Tolliver, Chad Williams

The Cardinals guessed wrong on their collection of talent here when they broke camp and it cost them dearly. Everyone disappointed among this group with the exception of Fitzgerald, who led the team with 69 receptions for 734 yards and six touchdowns, numbers that still were far below his averages the previous three seasons, and the rookie Kirk, who finished with 43 catches for 490 yards and three touchdowns before suffering a broken foot in Week 13 and landing on injured reserve. Williams and Nelson were non-factors who likely won't be back.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT *D.J. Humphries, LG *Mike Iupati (UFA), C Mason Cole, RG *Justin Pugh, RT Joe Barksdale (UFA)**
**Backups:** T *Korey Cunningham, C *A.Q. Shipley, G Colby Gossett, G Oday Aboushi (UFA), T Will Holden, G/T *Jeremy Vujnovich (UFA), C/G Daniel Munyer (UFA), T *John Wetzel (UFA), T Zack Golditch, G Rees Odhiambo

Because of injuries and ineffectiveness, the Cardinals were forced to start a staggering 10 different combinations along their offensive line in 2018 and it was one of the biggest rea-

**Larry Fitzgerald**
Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

sons for their overall failures on offense. Four of their projected five starters upon entering training camp — Humphries, Iupati, Shipley and Pugh — landed on injured reserve and a fifth, right tackle Andre Smith, was released because of a string of poor performances. Cole, the rookie out of Michigan, proved to be indestructible and likely has earned the starting job next season, but having seven linemen land on injured reserve was a death knell.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE *Markus Golden (UFA), DT Corey Peters, DT *Robert Nkemdiche, DE Chandler Jones**

**Backups:** DE *Benson Mayowa (UFA), DT *Olsen Pierre (UFA), DT Rodney Gunter (UFA), DT Vincent Valentine, DE Zack Moore (UFA), DE Cameron Malveaux, DE Vontarrius Dora

Jones didn't live up to his All-Pro status from a year earlier, but did finish with a team-leading 13 sacks. Golden took a long time to find his form after recovering from ACL surgery. Nkemdiche was a bust. Add that up with all the impending free agents and this group figures to be in need of a facelift in the offseason, especially if key reserves in the rotation such as Pierre and Gunter don't return. Mayowa was a very pleasant surprise, but he could be gone, too.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: SLB Haason Reddick, MLB *Josh Bynes, WLB Deone Bucannon (UFA)**

**Backups:** SLB Dennis Gardeck, MLB Gerald Hodges (UFA), MLB Zeke Turner, WLB Joe Walker, WLB *Jeremy Cash (UFA), MLB *Gabe Martin (UFA), SLB *Thurston Armbrister

Like the wide receivers, this unit was thin to begin with and injuries only made it thinner. By switching base defenses from a 3-4 to a 4-3, Wilks also decided that certain players who had been productive the previous season, namely Bucannon and Reddick, didn't fit into the system and thus, they languished at times on the sideline. The Cardinals decided to play mostly a nickel defense for most of the season and that also contributed to their problem stopping the run. Losing Bynes to a season-ending thumb injury was costly, as was losing Cash during the preseason.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: LCB Patrick Peterson, RCB David Amerson, SS Budda Baker, FS Antoine Bethea**

**Backups:** FS Tre Boston (UFA), CB Brandon Williams, CB Chris Jones, SS Rudy Ford, CB Deatrick Nichols, S *Jonathan Owens

Peterson had another Peterson-like season, but he created unnecessary waves at midseason by demanding a trade and later recanting that request. The Cardinals, meanwhile, constantly tried and failed to find a suitable starter opposite him, releasing two veterans during the season they thought could be fixes. Boston was a plus signing for a veteran on a cheap one-year free-agent deal. But he's probably gone. Baker needs to show he can stay healthy, but he's undersized and that could prove to be a problem. The jury is out as to whether the team feels Bethea can still log significant playing time or if it's best to move on from him.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### OFFENSIVE TACKLE

The Cardinals aren't sure about injury-prone left tackle D.J. Humphries or right tackle. They could use a tackle who can also play guard, for that matter.

### CORNERBACK

They've tried for years now to identify someone who could start opposite Patrick Peterson. They can't afford not to hit on this need through the draft, free agency or a trade.

### WIDE RECEIVER

Even with Larry Fitzgerald returning, the Cardinals need to upgrade at this position. Christian Kirk is a plus, but they need more elite-level talent.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K *Phil Dawson (UFA), P Andy Lee, K Zane Gonzalez, KOR T.J. Logan, PR Pharoh Cooper, LS Aaron Brewer

Dawson landed on injured reserve with a hip issue and after an up-and-down season, he's likely headed for retirement. Lee was sensational, but he got a lot of practice because of the Cardinals' anemic offense. Gonzalez had a chance to win a job for next season, but he probably blew out because of one too many misses. Logan and Cooper are two very intriguing prospects in the return game.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Josh Rosen | QB | UCLA | Learned a lot, but any growth didn't translate into results or any real recognizable progress. | (14/13) |
| 2 | Christiaan Kirk | WR | Texas A&M | Became one of Rosen's favorite targets until he broke his foot in Green Bay. | (12/7) |
| 3 | Mason Cole | C | Michigan | Performance is expected to land him the starting job next year ahead of returning veteran A.Q. Shipley. | (16/16) |
| 4 | Chase Edmonds | RB | Fordham | Made most of opportunities once he started becoming more involved in the week-to-week game plan. | (16/0) |
| 6 | Chris Campbell | CB | Penn State | Wasn't ready and was released on Sept. 1 before ultimately catching on with the Saints. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Korey Cunningham | T | Cincinnati | Got a chance to start in the final six weeks and did reasonably well. Provides depth. | (6/6) |

**SUMMARY: Draft looks good, particularly if Rosen can develop, Kirk regains his stride following foot surgery, and Cole continues to improve.**

Josh Rosen

# Atlanta Falcons

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 389.1 (6th)
**RUSHING:** 98.3 (27th)
**PASSING:** 290.8 (4th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 384.5 (28th)
**RUSHING:** 124.9 (25th)
**PASSING:** 259.6 (27th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

B- RATING

The Falcons have uncovered some solid starters in recent drafts and uncovered some surprises. Foyesade Oluokun (2018 sixth round), safety Damontae Kazee (2017 fifth round) and linebacker De'Vondre Campbell (2016 fourth round) all came later in the draft and made big contributions in 2018. One problem has been the ability to identify and choose NFL-ready offensive linemen; Sean Harlow (2017 fourth round) and Wes Schweitzer (2016 sixth round) are the only linemen drafted since Jake Matthews was the top choice in 2014.

**Best pick:** LB Deion Jones, R2 2016 – Jones has become the heart of the team's defense. He's a relentless tackler with a high motor and universally accepted as the leader. His absence with an injury crippled the defense last season but re-energized it when he returned.

**Worst pick:** CB Jalen Collins, R2 2015 – An over-reach to begin with, Collins never lived up to his potential. A four-game suspension for a performance-enhancing substance sealed his fate. He's currently on the Indianapolis practice squad.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 9 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| STARTERS | 3 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

It didn't take long for the changes to arrive at Falcons headquarters in the aftermath of a disheartening 7-9 season. The axe fell on offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian, defensive coordinator Marquand Manuel and longtime special teams coordinator Keith Armstrong. Head coach Dan Quinn plans to make the defensive calls going forward, while hiring Dirk Koetter as offensive coordinator and Ben Kotwica to coordinate the special teams.

The campaign was a tough slog from the beginning, starting with an opening night loss to Philadelphia. The inconsistent season saw the Falcons lose three straight, win three straight, lose five straight and win their final three. By the end of the year the fans had begun to stay away, an unfortunate conclusion for what most had hoped would include a run to the Super Bowl.

The offense performed well when the offensive line was intact, but when those guys began to drop with injuries, the running game slowed and the production dropped off. Veteran quarterback Matt Ryan and wide receiver Julio Jones virtually carried the offense for most of the year. Jones and Mohamed Sanu did a good job tutoring first-round pick Calvin Ridley. Tight end Austin Hooper enjoyed a breakthrough season.

The defense sustained heavy injuries early – safeties Keanu Neal and Ricardo Allen both went down, linebacker Deion Jones was hurt and missed 10 games. There were positives: Defensive tackle Grady Jarrett showed a high motor and Damontae Kazee made it known from training camp that he was going to be a difference maker.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Matt Ryan**
**Backup:** Matt Schaub (UFA)

Ryan had perhaps the second-best season of his career, throwing for 4,924 yards and 35 touchdowns with just seven interceptions. Ryan, 33, moved into 12th place for the most career touchdown passes. He remains quite durable, although that was tested by a poor offensive line that allowed Ryan to be sacked 42 times. Ryan was able to spread the ball around and often targeted – and connected with – eight or nine different receivers. Schaub is the dependable veteran backup that every club desires and shows no sign of retiring.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: *Devonta Freeman, FB Ricky Ortiz**
**Backups:** Tevin Coleman (UFA), *Ito Smith, Brian Hill, Jeremy Langford

The season-ending injury to Freeman put the team in a bad situation and forced Coleman to carry the load. Freeman was close to returning by the end of the year and is expected to be at full strength for camp. The team will have to decide whether to re-sign Coleman, a choice perhaps made easier by the promise shown by Smith. Coleman wound up with 800 yards rushing and caught 32 passes, but he may be considered a luxury if Freeman comes back strong. Smith ran for 315 yards and caught 27 passes. Hill helped himself by running hard when given a chance in the final two weeks.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Austin Hooper**
**Backups:** Logan Paulsen (UFA), Eric Saubert

Hooper has worked his way into becoming a valuable secondary target for Ryan. He caught 71 passes for a career-high 660 yards and earned a Pro Bowl berth. Paulsen and Saubert were both valuable backups, primarily for their blocking, although Paulsen caught all nine passes that came his way.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Julio Jones, Mohamed Sanu**
**Backups:** Calvin Ridley, Justin Hardy (UFA), Marvin Hall (UFA), Russell Gage

Jones has established himself as one of the premier receivers in the NFL. He finished with 1,677 yards, the highest total in the league and the second-highest of his career. He continues to fight through injuries to stay on the field. Sanu remains a consistent slot receiver and first-round draft choice Ridley was an unqualified success, setting the franchise record for rookies with 10 touchdown receptions. The trio of receivers is among the best in the NFL.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Jake Matthews, LG *Brandon Fusco, C Alex Mack, RG *Andy Levitre (UFA), RT Ryan Schraeder**
**Backups:** G Ben Garland (UFA), G Wes Schweitzer, T Matt Gono, RG Zane Beadles (UFA), LG Ty Sambrailo (UFA)

This group showed promise early in the season before injuries began to take their toll. Once that happened, the line turned into a hot mess. Matthews signed a new contract before the season began and remains the cornerstone of the line. Mack was named to the Pro Bowl, but that may have been based on reputation; he seems to be slowing down, particularly against the larger nose tackles. Fusco was a solid free-agent acquisition before getting hurt. By the end of the season it almost seemed like there were open tryouts for positions. This is an area that will require great attention.

**Julio Jones**
Benny Sieu-USA TODAY Sports

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE *Derrick Shelby (UFA), DT Jack Crawford, DT Grady Jarrett (UFA), DE Vic Beasley Jr.**

**Backups:** DT Justin Zimmer, NT Deadrin Senat, DE Brooks Reed, DE Takkarist McKinley, DT Terrell McClain (UFA), DE Steven Means (UFA), Bruce Irvin (UFA)

There are a lot of guys at this position who can contribute. There are no dominators. Atlanta must decide whether to re-sign Jarrett, one of those guys who plays with max-effort, or pursue someone through the draft or free agency. Same is true for Beasley, who seemed to show signs of life after Irwin joined the team, but has regressed since the Super Bowl season of 2016. McKinley remains an enigma and dealt with injury issues for part of the year. Irvin took a hometown discount to finish the season with the Falcons, but there's no guarantee he'll be around for 2019.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: MLB Deion Jones, OLB Foyesade Oluokun, OLB De'Vondre Campbell**

**Backups:** OLB Duke Riley, ILB Bruce Carter (UFA)

Jones missed 10 games with a foot injury (and still had 53 tackles, two interceptions and a sack) and his presence was definitely missed. Once he returned, the defense looked like it had new life. He wound up with 53 tackles. Campbell led the team in tackles and became the vocal leader when Jones was sidelined. Oluokun finished third in tackles and saw his profile greatly elevated. Frustration continues to mount over Riley, who has been given chance after chance and may be running out of opportunities.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Desmond Trufant, CB Robert Alford, S Damontae Kazee, S *Keanu Neal, S *Ricardo Allen**

**Backups:** S Jordan Richards (UFA), CB Isaiah Oliver, CB Justin Bethel (UFA), CB Blidi Wreh-Wilson (UFA), CB Brian Poole (UFA), S Kemal Ishmael (UFA), CB Ryan Neal, S Sharrod Neasman

The great discovery here was Kazee, who filled the play-making shoes left vacant by Neal's injury. Kazee was the hard hitter they expected and wound up with seven interceptions, the most by a Falcon since Ray "Big Play" Buchanan had seven in 1998. Trufant had a solid season, but he's no longer a lockdown corner. Alford remained one of the most picked-on guys in the league and was released in February. Veterans Neal and Allen will return, so the new defensive staff must find a way to keep Kazee on the field.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### DEFENSIVE LINE

There is a definite need to find a player who can get after the quarterback or draw enough double teams to set up sacks for others. That's been missing for two seasons.

### OFFENSIVE LINE

The right side of the line, in particular, was hurting in the final half of the season because of injuries and ineffectiveness. This is high on Matt Ryan's wish list.

### RUNNING BACK

Finding another back-in-waiting may be helpful, depending on whether the team opts to re-sign UFA Tevin Coleman.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K Matt Bryant, P Chris Bosher, PR Justin Hardy (UFA), KOR Marvin Hall (UFA), LS *Josh Harris, K Giorgio Tavecchio, LS Jon Condo (UFA)

Bryant, who turns 44 in May, remained one of the most consistent kickers in the league, but the team did not exercise its contract option after the season. Although he missed three games with a groin injury, he finished the season 20-for-21 on field goals. Bosher remains a consistent punter, averaging 45.5 yards, but he had two punts blocked. The returners are average at best, although Hardy averaged 7.4 yards on punt returns.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Calvin Ridley | WR | Alabama | Caught 64 passes and set a franchise record for most TD catches (10) by a rookie. | (16/5) |
| 2 | Isaiah Oliver | CB | Colorado | A slow start because of an ankle injury, but a fast finish has Oliver's stock on the rise. | (14/2) |
| 3 | Deadrin Senat | DT | South Florida | Would probably be the biggest disappointment of the draft and not ready to replace Grady Jarrett. | (15/2) |
| 4 | Ito Smith | RB | So. Mississippi | Showed signs of being the two-day threat they expected before season-ending knee injury. | (14/0) |
| 6 | Russell Gage | WR | Louisiana State | His good hands were evident in camp, as was his toughness. | (15/0) |
| 6 | Foyesade Oluokun | LB | Yale | One of the most pleasant surprises. Athleticism and intelligence made it hard to get him off the field. | (16/7) |

Calvin Ridley

**SUMMARY: It was a good draft that produced NFL-ready talent with four of the six rookies starting at one time. Depth was added at key positions.**

# Baltimore Ravens

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 374.9 (9th)

**RUSHING:** 152.6 (2nd)

**PASSING:** 222.4 (22nd)

**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 292.9 (1st)

**RUSHING:** 82.9 (4th)

**PASSING:** 210.0 (5th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

**B+** RATING

The Ravens are confident they found their long-term answer at quarterback with Lamar Jackson, a first-round pick in 2018. Linebacker C.J. Mosley (2014) earned his fourth trip to the Pro Bowl, and defensive tackle Michael Pierce (2016) has emerged as one of the best run stoppers in the NFL. Mosley, however, is a free agent and could earn a big payday elsewhere. The 2016 class boasts five players — left tackle Ronnie Stanley, receiver Chris Moore, tackle/guard Alex Lewis, defensive tackle Willie Henry and linebacker Matt Judon — that have been impact players. Marlon Humphrey (2017) is a long-term playmaker at cornerback. Running back Kenneth Dixon (2016) and tight end Nick Boyle (2015) have endured suspension by the NFL but have been able to bounce back and contribute. Overall, the 2015 class was a disappointment and did not produce one player that effectively contributed to the team.

**Best pick:** LB C.J. Mosley, R1 2014 — Earned his fourth trip to the Pro Bowl in five seasons. He led the Ravens with 105 tackles.

**Worst pick:** WR Breshad Perriman, R1 2015 — Battled injuries and uneven play throughout his time in Baltimore.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 9 | 9 | 11 | 6 | 12 |
| STARTERS | 2 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 9 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

The Ravens won the AFC North for the first time since 2012. However, the season ended in disappointment with a 23-17 loss to the Los Angeles Chargers in the first round of the AFC playoffs.

Veteran quarterback Joe Flacco has played his last snap for Baltimore, head coach John Harbaugh confirmed. The veteran injured his right hip in Week 9 against the Steelers, paving the way for rookie Lamar Jackson to take over a starting role. Jackson never relinquished it after going 6-1 over the final stretch of the regular season.

Other veterans, such as Terrell Suggs, Marshal Yanda and Jimmy Smith, also face an uncertain future. Suggs said he wants to continue playing, but was unsure about moving forward with Baltimore. The Ravens also have 18 other pending free agents, including four-time Pro-Bowl linebacker C.J. Mosley.

The season also marked the end of Ozzie Newsome's reign as the general manager. Newsome announced that he would step down from that role to make way for long-time assistant Eric DeCosta to take over as the full-time GM. Newsome does plan to stay with the team in some type of advisory role. This offseason, the Ravens need to upgrade the offensive line, which was manhandled by the Chargers in the playoff game, and find some more playmakers to complement Jackson.

A new era for the franchise is officially underway.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Lamar Jackson**

**Backups:** Joe Flacco, Robert Griffin III (UFA)

At age 21, Jackson was the youngest quarterback to ever start in the NFL postseason. He has effectively run the offense ever since he took over the starting role from Flacco, who suffered a right hip injury in Week 9. The Ravens won six of their last seven games with Jackson as the starter and earned their first AFC North title since 2012. Jackson amassed 556 rushing yards over that stretch, which ranked seventh in the NFL. Overall, Jackson led all NFL quarterbacks with 695 yards rushing. Flacco, who spent 11 seasons in Baltimore, will either be traded or released. Griffin served as a solid mentor to Jackson. He is a free agent, but Baltimore might want to bring him back as the primary backup next season.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: Gus Edwards**

**Backups:** Kenneth Dixon, *Alex Collins, Javorius Allen (UFA), Ty Montgomery (UFA), *DeLance Turner

The Ravens ranked second in the league with 2,441 yards rushing behind Seattle during the regular season. Baltimore also racked up the most total net yards (5,999) and second most rushing yards (2,441) in single-season franchise history. Edwards, an undrafted rookie, had the starting job over the second half of the season and was effective, running for 718 yards. The future of Dixon, Allen and Montgomery, who also returns punts, is uncertain with the team. The Ravens could look to upgrade through this year's draft or in the free-agency market.

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Mark Andrews**

**Backups:** Hayden Hurst, Nick Boyle, Maxx Williams (UFA)

Andrews, a rookie third-round pick, emerged as one of the team's top playmakers. He led all tight ends with 34 receptions for 552 yards and three touchdowns. Hurst, a first-round pick, was injured in training camp and never seemed to find his footing. Boyle had a solid season blocking and receiving. After a slow start, Williams also played well down the stretch. Boyle and Williams could test the free-agent market.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: John Brown (UFA), Michael Crabtree**

**Backups:** Willie Snead IV, Chris Moore, Jordan Lasley, *Jaleel Scott, *Quincy Adeboyejo

The production of this group declined when Jackson took over as the starting quarterback because he struggled to throw the ball downfield. Snead led the team with 62 receptions for 651 yards and a touchdown. Brown, who signed a one-year deal in the offseason, had 42 catches for 715 yards and five touchdowns. He will likely test the free-agent market. Crabtree struggled with drops. He had the most targets (100), but finished with 52 receptions. He could be a salary-cap casualty. Snead was a go-to receiver for Jackson and will likely return.

### OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Ronnie Stanley, LG Alex Lewis, C Matt Skura, RT Orlando Brown Jr., RG Marshal Yanda**

**Backups:** RG Bradley Bozeman, LT James Hurst, G/T Jermaine Eluemunor, T *Greg Senat, T *Steven Moore

This unit thrived with their run blocking when Jackson took over as the starting quarterback. However, the offensive line faltered in the playoff game against the Chargers, allowing seven sacks. Hurst and Lewis struggled with injuries. Brown emerged as a key starter and did not allow a sack in the regular season. The Ravens will likely look to further upgrade the line via free agency and the draft this offseason. Yanda was named second-team All-Pro by the Associated Press.

**Marlon Humphrey**
Photo by Mike De Sisti /Milwaukee Journal Sentinel via USA TODAY Sports

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: NT Brandon Williams, DT Chris Wormley, DE Brent Urban (UFA)**

**Backups:** DT Patrick Ricard, NT Michael Pierce, DE Zach Sieler, DT *Willie Henry

The Ravens were dominant against the run and were ranked fourth overall behind Chicago, New Orleans and Houston. Pierce emerged as a top playmaker and Urban also provided a physical presence. He could earn a big contract in the free-agent market. Williams had an uneven season after signing a contract extension. Henry was also poised for a breakout season before going on IR with a back injury in October.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Terrell Suggs (UFA), ILB C.J. Mosley (UFA), OLB Patrick Onwuasor, ILB Matthew Judon**

**Backups:** OLB Za'Darius Smith (UFA), SLB Tyus Bowser, OLB Tim Williams, ILB Kenny Young, MLB Chris Board, *Bam Bradley

Mosley earned his fourth trip to the Pro Bowl and is a free agent. He could earn a big payday elsewhere. Mosley was named All-Pro second team in 2018. The future of Suggs is also uncertain. The 36-year-old is a free agent and wants to play in 2019 and beyond, but he might have to find a new home. Suggs has played more games than any Raven in team history. He appeared in all 16 games this season and finished with seven sacks. Onwuasor and Judon had solid seasons. Both Bowser and Williams, each drafted in 2016, have been disappointments. Young, a rookie, was solid in coverage.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: LCB Brandon Carr, RCB Marlon Humphrey, SS Tony Jefferson, FS Eric Weddle**

**Backups:** LCB Jimmy Smith, LCB Anthony Averett, CB Tavon Young, CB Maurice Canady, SS Anthony Levine, FS Chuck Clark, RCB Cyrus Jones, CB *Jaylen Hill, S *DeShon Elliott, CB *Stanley Jean-Baptiste

Humphrey continues to emerge as one of the league's top shutdown corners. He did have some struggles late in the season. Smith bounced back from a torn Achilles and was productive for much of the season. However, he could be a salary-cap casualty this offseason. The veteran Carr played effectively and Young was solid in the slot. The rookie Averett showed he could be a consistent contributor. Canady has battled injuries throughout his career and played mostly on special teams. Humphrey, Smith and Carr finished with two interceptions apiece. Even though Weddle and Jefferson played well, their futures are uncertain because of the salary cap.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

P Sam Koch, K Justin Tucker, LS Morgan Cox, KOR Chris Moore, PR Cyrus Jones

The Ravens produce some of the top special teams players each season. Tucker has been one of the league's most consistent kickers. He was voted first-team All-Pro by the Associated Press. Tucker was also selected first-team All-Pro in 2014 and 2016. He is the most accurate kicker in NFL history, making 238-of-265 attempts during his seven-year career. He has also made more field goals than any other kicker since entering the league in 2012. Koch is also widely considered one of the best punters in the game. He had 27 kicks inside the 20. Cox is a mainstay as the long snapper. Jones gave the return game a boost when he was picked up in October after being released by the Patriots. Jones was named AFC Special Teams Player of the Week following his 70-yard punt return for a touchdown in a 34-17 victory over the Oakland Raiders in Week 12.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

# TOP 3 NEEDS

## OFFENSIVE LINE

The Ravens have their franchise quarterback in Lamar Jackson, so now they need to do a better job protecting him, especially at center and left guard.

## WIDE RECEIVER

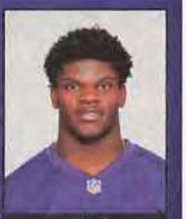
The goal this offseason is to help Jackson become more adept at throwing the ball downfield and the Ravens still need a player that can get behind the secondary, especially with the loss of several veterans.

## SAFETY

The Ravens need more support in the secondary especially with matchups against Baker Mayfield and Ben Roethlisberger twice a year.

# 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hayden Hurst | TE | South Carolina | Suffered injury in training camp and never played a key role in the offense. | (10/10) |
| 1 | Lamar Jackson | QB | Louisville | Went 6-1 as the starter, but struggled to throw the ball downfield. | (16/7) |
| 3 | Orlando Brown | T | Oklahoma | Thrust in as starter because of injuries; did not allow a sack in the regular season. | (16/10) |
| 3 | Mark Andrews | TE | Oklahoma | Overcame disappointing training camp with injuries and emerged as one the team's top playmakers. | (16/3) |
| 4 | Anthony Averett | CB | Alabama | While a bit undersized, played his way into the rotation; could be impact player in 2019. | (11/0) |
| 4 | Kenny Young | LB | UCLA | Earned playing time with outstanding training camp; finished fifth on team with 51 tackles, including 2.5 sacks. | (16/3) |
| 4 | Jaleel Scott | WR | New Mexico St. | Placed on injured reserve during training camp with a hamstring issue. | (0/0) |
| 5 | Jordan Lasley | WR | UCLA | Was inactive entire season; will need strong minicamp to prove he can help the offense. | (0/0) |
| 6 | DeShon Elliott | S | Texas | Fractured forearm in a preseason game and was placed on injured reserve. | (0/0) |
| 6 | Greg Senat | T | Wagner | Suffered toe injury in preseason game against Miami and was placed on injured reserve. | (0/0) |
| 6 | Bradley Bozeman | C | Alabama | Practiced hard and played himself into the rotation on the offensive line. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Zach Sieler | DE | Ferris State | On 53-man roster all season, but was not active for any games. | (2/0) |



Lamar Jackson

**SUMMARY: It took an injury, but the Ravens believe they found their QB of the future. The top four picks will be helped if Hurst improves.**

# Buffalo Bills

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 298.6 (30th)
**RUSHING:** 124.0 (9th)
**PASSING:** 174.6 (31st)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 294.1 (2nd)
**RUSHING:** 114.9 (16th)
**PASSING:** 179.2 (1st)

## 5-Year Breakdown

General manager Brandon Beane conducted his first draft with the Bills in 2018. Seven players made the 53-man roster and he landed three starters, including two cornerstones in quarterback Josh Allen and linebacker Tremaine Edmunds. He and head coach Sean McDermott came to Buffalo in 2017, and they purged much of the roster they inherited, and with expected departures in free agency this March, there is only one drafted player on the team that was not picked by this regime, that being 2016 first-round pick Shaq Lawson. The Bills have one of the lowest percentages of drafted players on their roster because of this strategy.

**Best pick:** LB Matt Milano, R5 2017 — He was an under-sized player who seemed like he'd be destined for a career on special teams. Instead, he's been a productive two-year starter and a foundation piece for a young team.

**Worst pick:** T Cyrus Kouandjio, R2, 2014 — He came to Buffalo with the promise of being a cornerstone at right tackle, and never fulfilled it. He wound up starting just seven games in three years with Buffalo.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 7 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 8 |
| STARTERS | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 3 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 5 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 2 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 1 |

There was no miraculous finish to save the Bills this season and push them into the playoffs. One year after sneaking into the postseason on the final day, thus ending their 17-year drought, the Bills stumbled out of the box by losing seven of their first nine games and never came close to contending.

However, this was an expected slide in the opposite direction because the Bills wisely dealt with their horrendous salary-cap situation as they ate nearly $70 million in dead money by the end of the year, all with the purpose of clearing the decks for 2019 and beyond.

General manager Brandon Beane and head coach Sean McDermott were up front with the strategy and while a 6-10 record is always tough to swallow, both men admitted they felt better following this season about the direction of the franchise than they did after the playoff loss in 2017.

"In the context of where we're trying to go, yes," McDermott said. "I'm not a good loser in terms of 6-10, that keeps me up at night and wakes me up awful early. But where we're trying to go, and what I've been around in this process, once in Philadelphia and once in Carolina, and what it takes to get the organization where we're trying to go, I feel like there's been some small wins — albeit not on the scoreboard enough — that has us going in the right direction."

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Josh Allen**
**Backups:** Matt Barkley, Derek Anderson

Allen was thrust into the spotlight way before he was ready thanks to the implosion of Nathan Peterman, and sure enough, he struggled terribly. After suffering an elbow injury and missing four games, he returned and showed some growth. But 10 touchdown passes, 12 picks and a rating of 67.9 doesn't get it done, and the Bills have to hope Allen will make a big leap in Year 2. He ended up as the team's leading rusher with 631 yards, averaging 7.1 yards per attempt and eight touchdowns. Barkley and Anderson were both re-signed to return as backups.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: LeSean McCoy, FB Patrick DiMarco**
**Backups:** Chris Ivory, *Marcus Murphy, Keith Ford, *Taiwan Jones (UFA)

McCoy endured the worst season of his 10-year career as he rushed for only 514 yards and a 3.2 average per carry. This was due to a combination of poor offensive line play, defenses not respecting the Bills' passing game, and McCoy being in decline. The Bills have a tough decision on whether to retain McCoy for the final season of his contract, at $9 million. Ivory didn't fare much better at 3.3 yards per carry. Murphy showed occasional flashes but could not be trusted in pass protection.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starters: Jason Croom**
**Backups:** Charles Clay, Logan Thomas

Clay was a massive disappointment. He caught just 21 passes for 184 yards and lost his starting job to Croom at the end of the season. Playing 117 fewer snaps, Croom had 22 catches for 259 yards. There's a good chance Clay is not brought back for the final year of his contract, and Croom may be given the first chance to win the starting job. Thomas had almost no impact when he played, but in his defense, he's only been a tight end for two years.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Robert Foster, Zay Jones**
**Backups:** Isaiah McKenzie, Deonte Thompson (UFA), Ray-Ray McCloud, Victor Bolden, Da'Mari Scott

Foster was one of the best surprises of the season. He played the first six games and made only two catches, then was cut and re-signed to the practice squad. He was promoted back to the 53-man roster and it clicked as he finished with 27 catches for 541 yards. Jones made a nice jump from a subpar rookie season. He led the Bills across the board with 56 receptions for 652 yards and seven touchdowns, though too much of that came when games were already decided. McKenzie joined the team in the second half of the season and played well as a receiver and as a runner. McCloud was a sixth-round pick who provided nothing. Thompson played sparingly after rejoining the team following a short stint in Dallas and won't be re-signed.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Dion Dawkins, LG Wyatt Teller, C *Russell Bodine, RG John Miller (UFA), RT Jordan Mills (UFA)**
**Backups:** C-G Ryan Groy (UFA), T Jeremiah Sirles (UFA), G Vladimir Ducasse, G Ike Boettger, T Conor McDermott

This was a disaster all season. After losing three starters, Eric Wood, Richie Incognito and Cordy Glenn, the Bills had no one capable of picking up the slack. Dawkins, after a promising rookie year, slid back as he clearly missed having Incognito next to him, penalties being his biggest issue as he had a team-high 11 accepted infractions. Groy and Ducasse began the season as starters but were benched, though Groy went back in at center when Bodine broke his leg. Teller showed promise as a fifth-round rookie, but he has a ways to go before he can be relied upon. There will be a major overhaul here in the offseason.

**Tre'Davious White**
Photo by Rich Barnes-USA TODAY Sports

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DT Kyle Williams (retired), DT Star Lotulelei, DE Jerry Hughes, DE Shaq Lawson**

**Backups:** DE Trent Murphy, DT Harrison Phillips, DE Mike Love, DT Jordan Phillips (UFA), DE Eddie Yarbrough

The Bills had a decent rotation both inside and on the edge, one of the few areas where they had productive depth. Hughes was one of the best edge rushers in the NFL in terms of pressure and he led the team with seven sacks. Lawson showed improvement in his third season. The two free-agent signees weren't great as Murphy was slowed by injuries all year and Lotulelei rarely did anything that was visibly noticeable. Williams will be tough to replace in the locker room, but the Bills believe third-round rookie Harrison Phillips will fill the void on the field.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: WLB *Matt Milano, MLB Tremaine Edmunds, SLB Lorenzo Alexander (UFA)**

**Backups:** LB Deon Lacey, LB Julian Stanford, LB Corey Thompson

Milano had six turnovers before breaking his leg late in the year and missing the final three games. Edmunds stepped into the middle linebacker role and played more than 90 percent of the snaps as he led the team with 121 tackles. Alexander was the defensive MVP as the 35-year-old did a little bit of everything, including recording 6.5 sacks and making two interceptions. Beyond those three, there is zero depth.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Tre'Davious White, CB Levi Wallace, SS Micah Hyde, FS Jordan Poyer**

**Backups:** CB *Taron Johnson, CB Lafayette Pitts, CB Ryan Lewis, S Siran Neal, S Rafael Bush, S Dean Marlowe, CB Denzel Rice

The Bills led the NFL in pass defense and Poyer and Hyde were a big reason for that as they continued on as one of the best safety duos in the NFL. White's play slipped a bit, but he was typically covering the opponent's best receiver. The arrow is still pointing up with him. Wallace, an undrafted rookie, was a huge surprise after he became a starter with seven games left. Johnson was solid at nickel corner before a shoulder injury ended his season.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### OFFENSIVE LINE

The Bills could realistically have three, maybe four, new starters via the draft and free agency on their offensive line in 2018.

### WIDE RECEIVER

The Bills had one of the weakest groups in the league and are desperate for a true No. 1-type target.

### CORNERBACK

They like Levi Wallace, an undrafted free agent in 2018 who started the last seven games, but ideally, the Bills want someone to push Wallace.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K Stephen Hauschka, P Matt Darr, KOR Victor Bolden, PR Isaiah McKenzie, LS Reid Ferguson

Hauschka went 22 of 28 on field goals, but four of the misses came in the final three weeks when he was battling through an injury. The Bills cycled through three punters, and all were below average. Bolden joined the team late and showed some flash on kickoff returns, while McKenzie was a nice find because he contributed in the return game, as a receiver, and as a runner on jet sweeps.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Josh Allen | QB | Wyoming | Revelation as a runner, but he has a long way to go as a passer. | (12/11) |
| 1 | Tremaine Edmunds | LB | Virginia Tech | Had a lot on his plate; played more than 90 percent of the snaps as QB of the defense. | (15/15) |
| 3 | Harrison Phillips | DT | Stanford | Drafted to be Kyle Williams' replacement; was solid, though not much of a difference-maker. | (16/0) |
| 4 | Taron Johnson | CB | Weber State | A true find for nickel-corner role. Season affected by shoulder injury. | (11/1) |
| 5 | Siran Neal | DB | Jacksonville State | Played almost exclusively on special teams and was fourth on the team in snaps. | (16/0) |
| 5 | Wyatt Teller | G | Virginia Tech | Took a while before he was ready, but started last seven games and showed promise. | (8/7) |
| 6 | Ray-Ray McCloud | WR | Clemson | Had almost no impact on offense or special teams; just five catches for 36 yards. | (10/0) |
| 7 | Austin Proehl | WR | North Carolina | Did little in camp and was cut without being brought back to the practice squad. | (0/0) |

Josh Allen

**SUMMARY: While Allen needs work, he should be the quarterback for a long time. Pressure will be on Phillips as the heir apparent to Kyle Williams.**

# Carolina Panthers

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 373.3 (10th)
**RUSHING:** 133.5 (4th)
**PASSING:** 239.8 (16th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 353.2 (15th)
**RUSHING:** 112.8 (12th)
**PASSING:** 240.4 (18th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

The Panthers have seen fruits of recent drafts, with running back Christian McCaffrey headlining the group. But others have been immediate impact players as well and that's particularly rewarding given the contributions in 2018 from rookies DJ Moore, Donte Jackson and Ian Thomas. But the grooming of other players has been crucial as offensive lineman Taylor Moton moved up to a starting role in 2018 and fullback Alex Armah has been steady. There was growth from second-year receiver Curtis Samuel, though part of the logjam there came because Moore was ready right away. A dip taken by 2015 second-round receiver Devin Funchess means more depth might be needed among wideouts. **Best pick:** RB Christian McCaffrey, R1 2017 — His rookie year was a good one, but the production took off in his second season and he factors heavily in the rushing and passing attacks. **Worst pick:** CB Zack Sanchez, R5 2016 — The Panthers had a need at this position and Sanchez was given a chance, but didn't turn out to be the right fit despite playing in five games as a rookie.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 6 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 8 |
| STARTERS | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

The Carolina Panthers floundered down the stretch with a seven-game losing streak that cost them a chance at a playoff spot. The skid was snapped in the finale against the playoff-bound New Orleans Saints, who sat out numerous regulars, and so the Panthers ended up with a 7-9 record. In reflection, the 6-2 start might have been a mirage given that it took a 63-yard game-winning field goal to defeat the New York Giants and a comeback from a 17-point fourth-quarter hole to win at Philadelphia.

Quarterback Cam Newton's ailing shoulder became a trouble spot by late in the season and he sat out the last two games. His inability to make down-field throws turned out to be a detriment too large to overcome even with versatile running back Christian McCaffrey becoming a showcase piece of the offense. Even with speedy receivers capable of making big plays, inconsistency was too much to overcome.

The team has never had consecutive winning seasons, and this latest misery has put head coach Ron Rivera on the hot seat. He fired a couple of defensive assistants in early December and took over the defensive play-calling, a move that seemed to come out of desperation. Linebacker Luke Kuechly put together another All-Pro season, but a fierce pass rush, which had been a staple of past successful teams, never materialized on a consistent basis.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Cam Newton**

**Backups:** Kyle Allen, *Taylor Heinicke (UFA)

Newton remains a dual-threat quarterback but without shoulder strength to stretch defenses he became less of a weapon. His return to health is of the utmost priority for the offseason. Now he has gone two seasons with large gaps in time when he hasn't had regular practice reps and that was bound to catch up to the team. The Panthers took a gamble without a veteran backup option and so that might have made them slow in putting Newton on the shelf for the season. By the end, the Panthers used three starting quarterbacks (Newton, Heinicke, Allen) across the final three games.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: Christian McCaffrey, FB Alex Armah**

**Backups:** Cameron Artis-Payne (UFA), *Kenjon Barner (UFA), Travaris Cadet (UFA), *Fozzy Whittaker (UFA), Elijah Hood

McCaffrey, a second-year player, churned out a franchise-record 1,965 yards from scrimmage, and he likely would have had more if not for the reduced role in the finale when the Panthers didn't have anything at stake. His 107 receptions marked the most in a season by a running back in NFL history. McCaffrey's role was so vital that the Panthers let C.J. Anderson, a 2017 1,000-yard rusher who had signed in the offseason when leaving Denver, go when his playing time had pretty much been zapped. Given McCaffrey's workload, his durability was lauded particularly as he took some punishment in racking up 1,098 rushing yards.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: *Greg Olsen**

**Backups:** Ian Thomas, Chris Manhertz, Jason Vander Laan

Olsen suffered a couple of injuries that reduced him to nine games after a seven-game 2017 season. He scored four touchdowns in 2018, so he can be productive if he can get his foot ailment solved. Without Olsen, the Panthers were unexpectedly able to see the potential for Thomas, a rookie whose role grew and at times looked like a comfortable option in the passing attack. Still, it might be a stretch to think that Thomas is ready for a primary role so soon.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Devin Funchess (UFA), DJ Moore**

**Backups:** Curtis Samuel, Torrey Smith, Jarius Wright, Mose Frazier, *Damiere Byrd

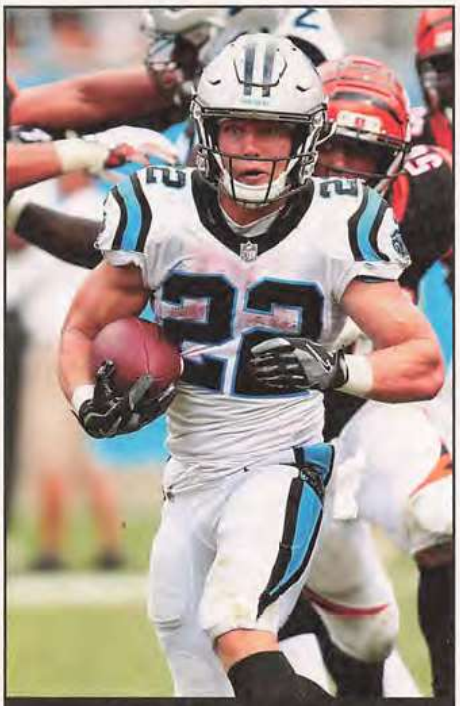
Funchess was supposed to be the top threat in the passing attack, but that didn't pan out in a positive way. He was hurt by drops that became glaring and so confidence in his production has waned. That was evident as his playing time took a dip late in the season. Moore had a strong rookie season, showing the flash that a first-round draft pick would figure to have. Moore's fumbling was a problem and something that needs to be addressed. Samuel was healthier for his second season, but he needs to prove he can be consistent in order to get more opportunities.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Chris Clark (UFA), LG Greg Van Roten, C Ryan Kalil (retiring/UFA), RG Trai Turner, RT Taylor Moton**

**Backups:** T Marshall Newhouse (UFA), G/C Tyler Larsen, G Taylor Hearn, T *Matt Kalil, G *Amini Silatolu (UFA), T *Daryl Williams (UFA)

This unit took a beating with injuries and there were times that the unit didn't mesh. But the unit did provide enough avenues to make the Panthers one of the top rushing teams in the league. This group needs to be rebuilt, if for



**Christian McCaffrey**
Photo by Jeremy Brevard-USA TODAY Sports

no other reason than Ryan Kalil is following through on his retirement plans. Larsen could be the answer for that spot as he has done well in several areas when called upon and it figures that he'll be given a shot. Van Roten proved to be durable by playing in all of the team's 1,058 offensive snaps this season.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Mario Addison, DT Kawann Short, DT Dontari Poe, DE Julius Peppers (UFA)**

**Backups:** DE Efe Obada, DT Kyle Love (UFA), DT Vernon Butler, DE Wes Horton (UFA), DE Marquis Haynes, DE Bryan Cox Jr., DE Marquis Haynes

The pass rush that helped define the defense in the past was largely absent. Peppers had only five sacks in his 17th NFL season and he announced his retirement in late January. Love put together a solid season in the middle and Short was often a factor in helping control the line. Contributions from others often seemed sporadic, though Obada provided some feel-good moments as an unexpected contributor.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB * Shaq Thompson, MLB Luke Kuechly, OLB Thomas Davis (UFA)**

**Backups:** LB David Mayo (UFA), OLB Jermaine Carter Jr., OLB Andre Smith, OLB Ben Jacobs (UFA), LB *Jared Norris

Kuechly turned in another All-Pro season, racking up 130 tackles to rank eighth in the league. In his seven seasons, no player in the NFL has more than his 948 tackles and he continues to be the centerpiece of the defense. Thompson made considerable strides until a late-season injury cut short his season. Davis missed the first four games because of an NFL suspension and it's possible he'll want to return for a 15th NFL season so he can end on a better note. However, that will likely be with another team after the Panthers said he won't be back.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB James Bradberry, CB Donte Jackson, SS Eric Reid (UFA), FS Mike Adams (UFA)**

**Backups:** CB Captain Munnerlyn, CB Corn Elder, CB Lorenzo Doss, SS Colin Jones (UFA), FS Rashaan Gaulden, CB *Ross Cockrell, S Quin Blanding, S *Da'Norris Searcy

Bradberry continued to emerge as a quality cornerback in his third season, something the Panthers were desperately counting on. That's not to say he didn't have some issues along the way and that's where the secondary has to tidy up. Jackson had a stellar first half of his rookie season, showing the play-making ability that gives reason to believe he can develop into a solid player. Reid arrived a few weeks into the season and his big-hitting ability was an asset, but there were times when his athleticism couldn't make up for what might have been rustiness from his time off. Without a disruptive pass rush, the back end was left vulnerable too often.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### OFFENSIVE LINE

There will be some upheaval in this area and it might become extensive. There will be anywhere from one to three spots to fill, though Taylor Moton's versatility could provide some flexibility here.

### QUARTERBACK

The Panthers need to make sure they're in a position of strength at the No. 2 signal-caller spot. Unfortunately, Taylor Heinicke's audition was limited because of injury.

### DEFENSIVE END

With Julius Peppers deciding to retire, the need at the position has been heightened. More explosive plays are needed.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K *Graham Gano, K Chandler Catanzaro (UFA), P Michael Palardy, KOR/PR Kenjon Barner, LS JJ Jansen

Gano was sensational for the first half of the season, then a few misses (three extra points in particular) proved detrimental before an injured left knee ended his season. Gano's 63-yard field goal was enough to defeat the New York Giants, providing a highlight. He ended up 14-for-16 on field goals. Catanzaro was a suitable replacement. Gano might have to prove himself again in training camp, though he finished the first season of a four-year contract. Palardy remains consistent and a valuable asset. The return games never produced much, but at least the coverage units didn't surface as problems.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | DJ Moore | WR | Maryland | Averaged 14.3 yards on 55 receptions and was a threat on rushing plays. | (16/10) |
| 2 | Donte Jackson | CB | Louisiana State | Great start to season, though exposed at times in latter part. Finished with four interceptions. | (16/16) |
| 3 | Rashaan Gaulden | S | Louisiana State | Playing behind Mike Adams meant his chances were limited but has difference-maker speed. | (15/0) |
| 4 | Ian Thomas | TE | Indiana | Made TD catches in each of last two games; had developed rapport with QB Cam Newton. | (16/6) |
| 4 | Marquis Haynes | DE | Mississippi | Wasn't ready to move into regulator rotation and he's already 25 years old. | (4/0) |
| 5 | Jermaine Carter Jr | LB | Maryland | Had chance for increased role late in season; will give staff chance for better evaluation. | (16/1) |
| 7 | Andre Smith | LB | North Carolina | Used sparingly on special teams, but mostly a season to learn system. | (3/0) |
| 8 | Kendrick Norton | DT | Miami | Claimed off practice squad by the Miami Dolphins before ever playing in a Carolina game. | (0/0) |

DJ Moore

**SUMMARY: Encouraging beginning for defensive backs, but the big surprise turned out to be Thomas. Moore proved to be a good catch for the top pick.**

# Chicago Bears

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 343.9 (21st)
**RUSHING:** 121.1 (11th)
**PASSING:** 222.8 (21st)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 299.7 (3rd)
**RUSHING:** 80.0 (1st)
**PASSING:** 219.7 (7th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

**B** RATING

General manager Ryan Pace started slowly with Kevin White as his first pick, but he has learned about taking risks. Pace gradually brought in more and more productive or special players in each draft. Tarik Cohen, in Round 4, and Bilal Nichols, in Round 5, were complete steals. Nichols outperformed both holdovers at his position this year. Each top pick from 2016-18 has star qualities. Even criticism of Pace for spending extra picks and moving up for Mitchell Trubisky has subsided as their quarterback proved capable of moving a team into position in the last minute to win a playoff game. Beyond anything, Pace has filled starting spots with capable talent so it's unnecessary to spend wildly on free agents.

**Best pick:** RB Tarik Cohen, R4 2017 — The ability to run routes effectively outside or in the backfield makes him useful for attacking defenses in multiple ways.

**Worst pick:** WR Kevin White, R1 2015 — White has every necessary physical tool, but proved unable to fit two offenses. He seems unable to diagnose and react on the fly.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 8 | 6 | 9 | 5 | 7 |
| STARTERS | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 |

The key trade for Khalil Mack a week before the season started, and youthful enthusiasm of head coach Matt Nagy provided a push needed to dislodge the Chicago Bears from complete irrelevance in the NFC North.

Change quickly accelerated into a wildly successful 12-5 season, and the first division title since 2010.

Nagy's cutting-edge offense stressing run-pass options set quarterback Mitchell Trubisky on the right path toward development. Trubisky seemed to take strides within the offense even in their season-ending playoff loss to the Philadelphia Eagles. The offense improved only to 21st overall after being 30th last year, but showed imagination, held the ball and scored key points to complement a dominant defense.

Mack's overpowering rush gave defensive coordinator Vic Fangio the final piece needed to ratchet up pressure and squeeze opposing offenses into turning over the ball at a league-high rate. However, Fangio left to become head coach of the Broncos.

As always, a flip of this magnitude requires good fortune. The Bears had it.

The only starter on injured reserve at season's end was nickel package cornerback Bryce Callahan. A weaker, last-place schedule worked in their favor, as well, although convincing wins over the defending division champion Vikings twice, the Rams and the Seahawks showed the Bears could beat playoff teams.

Questions about talent level at some positions linger, but it's apparent a track for future playoff runs has been laid.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Mitchell Trubisky**
**Backup:** Chase Daniel

Trubisky found more comfort spots within the offense as the season unwound, and Nagy figured out what they were. Trubisky then played more efficiently, throwing 24 touchdown passes over the final 13 regular-season games. He finished without an interception in his final four games. Trubisky's pocket awareness improved dramatically since Week 1, and he blended scrambling with passes. Better game-situation awareness and touch on deep passes is necessary going forward. Occasional wildness results from his poor passing mechanics, but comfort within the offense and facing NFL defenses can correct this. Daniel is a system quarterback who proved his value under fire with two solid starts. Finding a more mobile third quarterback for grooming might be a personnel project.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: Jordan Howard**
**Backups:** Tarik Cohen, Taquan Mizzell Sr., Benny Cunningham (UFA), FB Michael Burton

Fitting Howard's style within the blocking scheme proved tricky. Although healthy, he appeared a step slow. By the final three games, Howard started seeing cutback lanes better. He averaged only 3.7 yards a carry. With a year left on his contract, Howard may not be ideal for Nagy's offense because he lacks the burst for big plays. Cohen made special teams All-Pro, and the Bears only sporadically harnessed their big-play ability on offense. Considering he had little exposure to a passing attack like this, it's possible Cohen's development as a receiver will accelerate. Nagy unsuccessfully tried to find a use for Mizzell. More depth and speed is necessary. The only indispensable back is Cohen.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Trey Burton**
**Backups:** Adam Shaheen, Daniel Brown, Ben Braunecker, *Dion Sims

Burton's mysterious groin injury the day before the playoff game cast a shadow over an otherwise positive season in which he caught six touchdown passes and filled numerous roles within the scheme. It's questionable whether he can be counted on going forward. Shaheen's foot injury slowed his growth and he'll have much to prove, but his size makes him a red-zone threat. Sims hasn't fit this offense while Brown and Braunecker are role players. The Bears can use another all-purpose tight-end threat for depth and as a dual goal-line asset.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Allen Robinson II, Taylor Gabriel**
**Backups:** Anthony Miller, Josh Bellamy (UFA), Kevin White (UFA), Javon Wims

Robinson gradually gained confidence after last year's ACL injury and it showed in his 10-catch playoff game. However, his overall numbers (55-754) probably weren't what he expected. Nagy's offense stresses balance, but Robinson still has to be that go-to receiver every quarterback needs. Gabriel didn't make the catch and run an ideal amount of times, averaging 10.3 yards a reception. However, he displayed more ability to get deep for passes than anticipated. Miller occasionally vanished, but flashed good overall skills and had a solid impact for a rookie with a team-high seven touchdowns and 33 catches. Wims had enough success in one regular-season game to be a potential future contributor rather than a project. White is the biggest Bears draft bust since Cade McNown.

**Khalil Mack**
Photo by Cary Edmondson-USA TODAY Sports

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Charles Leno Jr., LG James Daniels, C Cody Whitehair, RG Kyle Long, RT Bobby Massie (UFA)**

**Backups:** G Bryan Witzmann, G/C Eric Kush (UFA), T Bradley Sowell, T Rashaad Coward

One of the team's few areas affected extensively by injuries, they overcame inconsistencies, gained continuity in the blocking scheme and rounded into a viable unit. Daniels made a statement as a rookie and rarely looked overmatched. Whitehair's shotgun-snapping troubles eventually cleared up and he played at a level displayed in 2016 as a rookie. After Long's foot injury healed, his return made the line more physical in the running game. Both tackles exceeded expectations based on past performances. Massie easily had his best season, going without a holding penalty. It was thought they might go younger and stronger at right tackle, but he signed a contract extension in early February. Witzmann showed he's a more valuable backup than Kush based on system knowledge. They could use a swing tackle more physical than Sowell.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starter: LDE Akiem Hicks, NT Eddie Goldman, RDE Bilal Nichols**

**Backups:** DE Roy Robertson-Harris, DE Jonathan Bullard, DT Nick Williams

Hicks repeated the dominance he displayed in 2017, and emerged a leader not only on defense but for the entire team. He might be the most indispensable Bear. Goldman continued as a devastating interior plug without fanfare, and is nearly as valuable as Hicks. Robertson-Harris flashes occasionally, but Bullard hasn't gone beyond being a name on the depth chart. Nichols battled through a minor season-long knee issue, made big plays and projects as a long-term playmaker. Williams showed preseason pass-rush ability.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starter: OLB Leonard Floyd, ILB Roquan Smith, ILB Danny Trevathan, OLB Khalil Mack**

**Backups:** ILB Nick Kwiatkoski, ILB Joel Iyiegbuniwe, OLB Aaron Lynch, OLB Kylie Fitts, OLB Isaiah Irving, *OLB Sam Acho, *ILB Andrew Trumbetti

Mack's skills lifted the defense from stout to scary. The way he creates opportunities for teammates is obvious, but can't be measured. Floyd gutted out a hand injury and learned eventually to play off Mack's success. As Smith picked up the defense, his speed became a weapon all over the field. Mack and Smith allowed Trevathan to focus on being a field leader rather than solely a playmaker. It's an optimum situation as he goes into a contract year. Depth vanished with the loss of Acho early and Lynch late. Both are assets.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: LCB Kyle Fuller, RCB Prince Amukamara, S Eddie Jackson, S Adrian Amos (UFA)**

**Backups:** *CB Bryce Callahan (UFA), CB Sherrick McManis, S Deon Bush, S DeAndre Houston-Carson, CB Kevin Toliver, CB Marcus Williams, CB *Rashard Fant

Fuller realized his full potential, and is unafraid of taking chances. He has progressed to being able to setting up receivers and burn them. Amukamara dazzles with sound blanket coverage. Jackson understands how to anticipate and play angles, reducing the risk in trying for interceptions rather than breakups. He still must become more physical. Already solid at pursuit, Amos rarely gets beat and has improved at fielding 50-50 throws. Callahan finally enjoyed enough health to grow in his nickel role, but was again hampered by injury.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### RUNNING BACK

In this offense, it's about speed for those handling the ball. A tailback needs strength for durability, but must be a breakaway threat and not a plodder.

### CORNERBACK

Another slot defender is necessary for depth regardless of whether Bryce Callahan leaves in free agency. Callahan lacks size and has had problems staying healthy.

### TACKLE

They lack a power-blocking right tackle to trigger the running game. Massie plays at the level of many swing tackles. He's adequate, not an asset.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K Cody Parkey, P Pat O'Donnell (UFA), LS Patrick Scales, PR Tarik Cohen, KR Anthony Miller

Parkey's playoff disaster makes it a risk to team morale if he's retained. O'Donnell needed to display consistency to be kept, and it's questionable if he did. Scales occasionally was noticed: never a good thing for a long snapper. Cohen still fails to take obvious yardage on punt returns in favor of reversing field. But sometimes he makes risks pay off. When they choose not to overburden Cohen with returning kicks, they have no one to adequately fill this role.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Roquan Smith | LB | Georgia | A month-long holdout slowed early progress, but he rapidly surged. Look out next year. | (16/14) |
| 2 | James Daniels | LG | Iowa | Became a starter at mid-season and seemed overmatched only once. Strong, quick, intelligent. | (16/10) |
| 2 | Anthony Miller | WR | Memphis | Failed occasionally to own the playbook, but team-high seven TD catches revealed great potential. | (15/4) |
| 4 | Joel Iyiegbuniwe | LB | Western Kentucky | Awed a bit by the high step up in competition. Special teams regular. | (16/0) |
| 5 | Bilal Nichols | DL | Delaware | The find of Bears draft, eventually started despite nagging knee issue. Big-play potential. | (14/6) |
| 6 | Kylie Fitts | LB | Utah | Long-term project who didn't display athleticism to both cover in space and edge rush. | (6/0) |
| 7 | Javon Wims | WR | Georgia | Pro game wasn't too big for him. Played nice role in Week 17 win. | (5/0) |

Roquan Smith

**SUMMARY: One of the most complete drafts in recent Bears history because it paid immediate dividends. Well-crafted by general manager Ryan Pace, who moved up to take Miller.**

# Cincinnati Bengals

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 310.8 (26th)
**RUSHING:** 105.1 (21st)
**PASSING:** 205.6 (24th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 413.6 (32nd)
**RUSHING:** 137.8 (29th)
**PASSING:** 275.9 (32nd)

## 5-Year Breakdown

Cincinnati has selected some solid starters recently in running back Joe Mixon, cornerback William Jackson and wide receiver Tyler Boyd, but also has fired some duds in disappointing offensive lineman Cedric Ogbuehi, who was a first-round pick at No. 21 in 2015. Probably the best class of the last five years was 2016 which netted Jackson, Boyd, Vigil and special teams standout Clayton Fejedelem in the seventh round. Of the last five first-round picks, the Bengals can say they've hit correctly once with Jackson since they are waiting on John Ross to develop some consistency after missing all of his rookie season in 2017. Darqueze Dennard is a reserve.

**Best pick:** WR Tyler Boyd, R2 2016 — Boyd was solid in his first two seasons but really emerged as a top receiving option, especially after A.J. Green was lost for the season.

**Worst pick:** T Cedric Ogbuehi, R1 2015 — Ogbuehi struggled from the outset and by last season he was a reserve offensive lineman and not a particularly effective one.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 8 | 9 | 7 | 11 | 11 |
| STARTERS | 0 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| BACKUPS | 1 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 6 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 5 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

For the third straight year, the Cincinnati Bengals are left trying to find answers for what went wrong in their third straight losing season. Promising starts of 4-1 and 5-3 morphed into an ugly 6-10 record defined by a defense that couldn't stop anyone on a consistent basis. With seven losses in their last eight games, the carnage finally claimed head coach Marvin Lewis, whose time finally ran out after 16 seasons. Of course, it did not help matters when starting quarterback Andy Dalton and star wideout A.J. Green sustained season-ending injuries.

Though the late-season emergence of running back Joe Mixon was a positive along with the emergence of receiver Tyler Boyd, the Bengals did not get enough done offensively after the quick start and often fell behind early in games during their season-ending skid. Still, the showings by Mixon and Boyd can be viewed as among the few positives.

Defensively, the Bengals were awful. They were last in passing yards allowed (4,414) and 29th in rushing yards allowed (2,204). While things improved slightly after defensive coordinator Teryl Austin was fired, it was not good enough so the Bengals are figuring out how to fix three straight losing seasons and waited until after the Super Bowl to hire Rams quarterbacks coach Zac Taylor as head coach.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: *Andy Dalton**
**Backups:** Jeff Driskel, Tom Savage (UFA)

Quarterback play is not the problem for the Bengals with Dalton returning from a right thumb injury. Before getting hurt and missing the last five games, Dalton completed 61.9 percent of his passes and threw for 21 touchdowns. Regardless of what the coaching staff consists of, Dalton will return as he continues operating on a six-year deal that expires in 2021. Driskel showed some positive things in his first chance at getting the starting nod in place of Dalton and appears to be a competent backup. Savage was signed late in the season and is an unrestricted free agent. If the Bengals add a quarterback it likely would be someone to be third on the depth chart.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: Joe Mixon**
**Backups:** Giovani Bernard, Mark Walton

Cincinnati relied heavily on Mixon late in the season and it was one of the things to actually work. Mixon is still on his rookie deal and will not hit free agency until 2021. Assuming he does not get a long-term extension, Mixon is a bargain after averaging 4.9 yards per carry and leading the AFC with 1,198 yards. Mixon's emergence had a negative impact on Bernard since the Bengals don't often use two-back sets. Bernard finished with career lows of 211 yards and 56 carries while missing four games. Bernard has a cap hit of $4.5 million next season and could be a salary-cap casualty especially with the emergence of Mixon.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: *Tyler Eifert (UFA)**
**Backups:** Tyler Kroft (UFA), C.J. Uzomah (UFA), Matt Lengel (UFA)

Tight end could look significantly different next season since four players at this position are unrestricted free agents. Eifert (right ankle) and Kroft (foot) missed most of the season with injuries and it does not appear the Bengals would make an effort to retain them. Uzomah could be a different story as he emerged thanks to the injuries and was productive with 43 receptions and 439 yards while appearing in each game.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: *A.J. Green, *Tyler Boyd, John Ross**
**Backups:** Cody Core, Auden Tate, Alex Erickson, Josh Malone

A toe injury hindered Green but after surgery, he should return to normal. He finished with career lows of 46 catches and 694 yards while missing seven games. Green's injury allowed Boyd to emerge until he missed the last two games with a knee injury. Boyd was dynamic at times, finishing with 76 catches, 1,028 yards, and three 100-yard games. Ross showed some flashes at times and finished with seven touchdowns, but the Bengals are still waiting for him to show why he was a first-round pick in 2017.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Cordy Glenn, LG Clint Boling, C Billy Price, RG Alex Redmond (UFA), RT Bobby Hart (UFA)**
**Backups:** T Andre Smith (UFA), T Cedric Ogbuehi (UFA), G Trey Hopkins (UFA), T Jake Fisher (UFA), G Christian Westerman, C Brad Lundblade, T *G/T Rod Taylor

Assuming the Bengals do not re-sign Hart and Redmond, they will be in the market for two starters on the offensive line. Hart and Redmond struggled at various points during the season. Price had his moments. but also dealt with an early-season foot injury and his inability to block led to Dalton's season-ending injury. Trey Hopkins showed he could be versatile moving between the center and guard positions during the course of nearly 600 snaps.

Joe Mixon
Photo by Mark Konezny-USA TODAY Sports

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Carlos Dunlap, DE Michael Johnson (UFA), DT Geno Atkins, DT Andrew Billings**

**Backups:** DE Sam Hubbard, DE Jordan Willis, DE Carl Lawson, DT Christian Ringo, DT Niles Scott, DT Adolphus Washington, DT Ryan Glasgow

Anything that went wrong on the defense can't be pinned on Dunlap and Atkins, who produced their usual standout performances. Atkins led the team with 10 sacks and Dunlap was right behind him at eight. Hubbard turned out to be a good pick. He had six sacks and 39 tackles while appearing in each game and not starting any of them. Johnson is a free agent after getting half a sack in 15 games and likely won't be re-signed.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Nick Vigil, OLB Vontaze Burfict, MLB *Preston Brown (UFA)**

**Backups:** OLB Vincent Rey (UFA), MLB Hardy Nickerson, OLB Malik Jefferson, OLB Chris Worley

This unit turned out to be an injury-plagued group. Vigil missed five games with a knee injury, but his 84 tackles led all linebackers. Burfict was suspended for the first four games because of PED violations and then was concussed for the last game, which limited him to seven games. Brown is an unrestricted free agent and missed nine games due to injuries after never missing a game before joining the Bengals.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Dre Kirkpatrick, CB William Jackson, SS Shawn Williams, FS Jessie Bates**

**Backups:** CB Darqueze Dennard (UFA), CB Tony McRae (UFA), SS Clayton Fejedelem, FS Brandon Wilson, CB Darius Phillips

Jackson regained some of his rhythm once Lewis took over the defense. Bates and Williams led the team in tackles with 111 and 110 respectively, which of course can be viewed as an indictment on the defensive line and linebacking corps. Williams also led the Bengals in interceptions and Bates was second. Kirkpatrick dealt with injuries and missed three games. None of the starters are free agents and should return next season when they hope to get some better support from the defensive line and linebackers. Kirkpatrick is making the most money of any starter and could be a salary cap casualty.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### TIGHT END

Most of Cincinnati's tight ends are unrestricted free agents so a need will exist, especially if none are re-signed.

### RIGHT GUARD

Alex Redmond started most of the season at right guard but was not effective with missed blocks and penalties. The Bengals could definitely use an upgrade here.

### RIGHT TACKLE

Bobby Hart wasn't very good for the Giants and was mostly ineffective with the Bengals so an upgrade could be used either in the draft or free agency.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K Randy Bullock, P Kevin Huber, KR/PR Alex Erickson

Bullock made 39 of 41 extra points in his second full season with the Bengals, hit 19 of 23 field goals and 45 of his 78 kickoffs were not returned. Bullock signed a contract extension in the middle of the season. Huber punted 71 times for an average of 43.9 yards and a net average of 39.4 yards. Erickson averaged a career-high 10.6 yards on 20 punt returns and 26.2 yards on 40 kickoff returns.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Billy Price | C | Ohio State | Showed some positive things but also missed six games due to a foot injury. | (10/10) |
| 2 | Jessie Bates III | S | Wake Forest | Productive all season; led team with 111 tackles while adding three interceptions. | (16/16) |
| 3 | Sam Hubbard | DE | Ohio State | Proved to be a find and helped Dunlap and Atkins by being productive. | (16/0) |
| 3 | Malik Jefferson | LB | Texas | Possibly could eventually become a starter and replace Vontaze Burfict. | (12/0) |
| 4 | Mark Walton | RB | Miami | Appeared in 14 games but only had 34 rushing yards and 41 receiving yards. | (14/0) |
| 5 | Davontae Harris | CB | Illinois State | Only appeared in three games after getting hurt before the season opener. | (3/0) |
| 5 | Andrew Brown | DT | Virginia | Had nine sacks in his last two college seasons, but spent all season on practice squad. | (0/0) |
| 5 | Darius Phillips | CB | Western Michigan | Used as a reserve and on special teams while appearing in all but one game. | (15/0) |
| 7 | Logan Whiteside | QB | Toledo | On Titans practice squad briefly; now playing for The Alliance. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Rod Taylor | G/T | Mississippi | Spent entire season on injured reserve after getting hurt early in training camp. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Auden Tate | WR | Florida State | Played some snaps late in season because of A.J. Green's toe injury. | (7/0) |

Jessie Bates III

**SUMMARY: Bates and Hubbard were not disappointments, but the jury is out on Price after an injury-plagued season. Didn't get much out of their picks in the later rounds.**

# Cleveland Browns

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 368.8 (13th)

**RUSHING:** 118.3 (14th)

**PASSING:** 250.4 (14th)

**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 393.0 (30th)

**RUSHING:** 135.2 (28th)

**PASSING:** 257.8 (25th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

C+ RATING

The Browns totaled five first-round picks from 2014-16 and none is still on the team. The list of busts includes cornerback Justin Gilbert and quarterback Johnny Manziel in 2014 and wide receiver Corey Coleman in 2016. Former GM Sashi Brown did hit on linebacker Joe Schobert, defensive end Emmanuel Ogbah and wide receiver Rashard Higgins in 2016 plus defensive end Myles Garrett in 2017. That group and the 2018 draft were the foundation of the 2018 turnaround.

**Best pick:** QB Baker Mayfield, R1 2018 — The Browns have been searching for a quarterback since 1999. It's just one season, but it seems the search has ended. It would be a surprise if it hasn't.

**Worst pick:** CB Justin Gilbert, R1 2014 — A case could be made for quarterback Johnny Manziel here, but Gilbert was uncoachable and unproductive from the start. He's been out of the NFL for a while.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 6 | 12 | 14 | 10 | 9 |
| STARTERS | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 1 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 3 | 7 | 5 | 0 | 1 |

The Browns in 2018 made the biggest turnaround in franchise history by going from 0-16 in 2017 to 7-8-1.

The turnaround did not save interim head coach Gregg Williams, who went 5-3 after Hue Jackson was fired on Oct. 29.

Two days after a 26-24 loss in Baltimore that came down to a fourth-down interception thrown by Baker Mayfield on the Browns final possession of the season, general manager John Dorsey began a search for the Browns' ninth full-time head coach since 1999. Interim offensive coordinator Freddie Kitchens got the job.

The Browns missed the playoffs for the 16th consecutive year, but it was a season of hope nonetheless. Mayfield needed only 13 starts to set a NFL rookie record for touchdown passes in a season with 27, breaking the mark of 26 set by Peyton Manning in 16 games in 1998.

Rookie running back Nick Chubb is part of that hopeful future, too, after rushing for 996 yards.

The Browns took the ball away 31 times after getting only 13 takeaways in 2017. Despite that, the defense allowed 41 touchdowns – only one less than a year ago. The defense was gashed on 18 runs of 20 yards or more and 51 passes of 40 yards or more to spend in the off-season.

Browns fans are energized like they haven't been in 30 years. The future is bright with 11 draft picks and more than $80 million in salary cap room.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Baker Mayfield**

**Backups:** Tyrod Taylor (UFA), Drew Stanton

Jackson, who began the 2018 season as Browns head coach, insisted Taylor would be the starting quarterback all season so Mayfield could watch and learn. Taylor was concussed playing the Jets in the first half of the third game of the season. Mayfield took over, rallied the Browns from a 14-0 deficit to win the game, and his career took off. He set a rookie record with 27 touchdown passes and emerged as the undisputed leader of the team. Stanton was a valuable mentor for Mayfield in his rookie season and will continue in that role next year. Though Taylor never took a snap in the last 13 games, his work ethic rubbed off on Mayfield.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: Nick Chubb**

**Backups:** Duke Johnson Jr., Dontrell Hilliard

Chubb began the season backing up Carlos Hyde. Hyde was traded to the Jaguars before the seventh game. Chubb, picked 35th overall in 2018, finished the season with 996 rushing yards. He showed speed and an ability to break tackles when he ran outside and showed patience and vision on inside runs. Johnson was under-utilized. After catching 74 passes in 2017 he caught 47 in 2018. He carried the ball only 40 times. He is too talented to get only 87 touches in a season. Hilliard saw most of his action on special teams.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: David Njoku**

**Backups:** Seth DeValve, Darren Fells, *Pharaoh Brown, *Orson Charles

Coaches like to say players make their biggest jump from Year 1 to Year 2, and Njoku did that. He caught 32 passes as a rookie in 2017 and caught 56 in 2018. He dropped passes that hit him in the hands as a rookie. He played like a veteran in his second season. Mayfield trusted Njoku in clutch situations; a 66-yard catch and run by Njoku sealed the victory over Cincinnati in Week 16. The Browns were thin at tight end. Fells was signed chiefly for his blocking skills. He caught only 11 passes, but three of them were for touchdowns. Seth DeValve, after going from 10 catches as a rookie in 2016 to 33 last season, caught only five in 2018. He was basically invisible all season.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Jarvis Landry, Antonio Callaway**

**Backups:** Rashard Higgins, Breshad Perriman (UFA), Damion Ratley, *Ricardo Louis, *Rod Streater, *Derrick Willies

General manager John Dorsey traded a fourth-round and a seventh-round pick to the Dolphins for Landry and he drafted Callaway in the fourth round. Landry had 81 passes after catching 112 with the Dolphins. He and Mayfield need to work on developing chemistry. Callaway improved as the season progressed and led the team with five touchdown catches. Perriman, cut by the Ravens on Sept. 1, signed a one-year deal with the Browns on Oct. 13. He had a reputation of dropping passes with the Ravens, but he was a different player with the Browns. He caught 16 passes and averaged 21.3 yards a catch. Higgins proved he can be a deep threat with 39 catches (14.7-yard average) and four touchdowns.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Greg Robinson (UFA), LG Joel Bitonio, C JC Tretter, RG Kevin Zeitler, RT Chris Hubbard**

**Backups:** LT Desmond Harrison, LG Austin Corbett, C Kyle Kalis, RG Earl Watford (UFA)

The Browns hoped Harrison could step in at left tackle for retired All-Pro Joe Thomas, but gave up the experiment after eight weeks. Robinson, picked second overall by the Rams in 2014, took over and started the last half of the

**Myles Garrett**
Photo by Troy Taormina-USA TODAY Sports

season. The Browns hope to re-sign him. A veteran interior with Bitonio, Tretter and Zeitler was a key to the running game and kept opponents from crushing the pocket. Mayfield was able to escape when protection did break down. Hubbard was a bulldozer on run blocking. Depth is an issue, but except for the change at left tackle the other four starters played all 16 games. Tretter played most of the season on a sprained ankle.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LDE Emmanuel Ogbah, DT Trevon Coley, DT Larry Ogunjobi, RDE Myles Garrett**

**Backups:** DE Chris Smith, DE Anthony Zettel, DE Chad Thomas, DT Carl Davis (UFA), DT Brian Price, DE *Lenny Jones

Garrett had 13.5 sacks in 2018, missing by a half sack the franchise record set by Reggie Camp in 1984. Ogunjobi was dominant inside and led Browns defensive linemen with 52 tackles, but the Browns struggled against the run, especially when the starters weren't in the game. The Browns yielded an average of 4.7 yards a carry after giving up 3.4 yards in 2017. Improving the run defense is a top priority in the offseason. Ogbah was not the bookend (three sacks) pass rusher the Browns hoped he would be.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Jamie Collins, OLB *Christian Kirksey, MLB Joe Schobert**

**Backups:** OLB Genard Avery, MLB Ray-Ray Armstrong (UFA), OLB Tanner Vallejo, OLB D'Juan Hines, OLB Xavier Woodson-Luster

Schobert is the quarterback of the defense. He made the Pro Bowl after the 2017 season but wasn't even an alternate last year in part because he missed three games with a hamstring injury. A hamstring injury suffered in the Kansas City game put Kirksey on injured reserve and forced him to miss seven games. Avery, a fifth-round draft choice last year, showed he can rush the passer. He was solid against the run. Collins did not make spectacular plays, but he led the team with 104 tackles, had one interception, a fumble recovery and a forced fumble.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: LCB Denzel Ward, RCB Terrance Mitchell, SS Jabrill Peppers, FS Damarious Randall**

**Backups:** CB T.J. Carrie, DB Briean Boddy-Calhoun, S Derrick Kindred, S Jermaine Whitehead, CB Phillip Gaines, CB Tavierre Thomas, CB Justin Burris, CB *E.J. Gaines, CB *Howard Wilson

All but Peppers were new starters in the secondary. After intercepting seven passes in 2017 the Browns picked off 17 last year and cut down on passing touchdowns allowed from 28 to 21. Randall, acquired from Green Bay for quarterback DeShone Kizer, was the team leader the back end lacked last season. He had a team-high four interceptions. Right cornerback was a constant shuffle because of injuries. Ward suffered two concussions. Former defensive coordinator Gregg Williams said Ward must learn to tackle lower.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### DEFENSIVE TACKLE

The Browns gave up 20 rushing touchdowns and an average of 4.7 yards a carry in 2018. They need a run-stopper on the inside of their line either through free agency or the draft.

### OUTSIDE LINEBACKER

The defense needs a dominant, game-changing linebacker. Jamie Collins isn't that player and neither is anyone else on the roster.

### LEFT TACKLE

Baker Mayfield buys time moving in the pocket, but the Browns need a better anchor than Greg Robinson on the left side of the line.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K Greg Joseph, P Britton Colquitt, KOR/PR Jabrill Peppers, LS Charley Hughlett

Zane Gonzalez began the season as the kicker. He was replaced by Greg Joseph, who hit 17-of-20 field goal attempts. Two of Colquitt's punts were blocked. Peppers was hesitant on kick returns until late in the season. Inconsistent punt and kick coverage were problems all season.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Baker Mayfield | QB | Oklahoma | Broke rookie record with 27 touchdown passes and energized the team and the city. | (14/13) |
| 1 | Denzel Ward | CB | Ohio State | Ward made the Pro Bowl and took the ball away five times. He suffered two concussions. | (13/12) |
| 2 | Austin Corbett | OL | Nevada | Corbett could not establish himself on a line with a veteran interior, but Browns still believe in him. | (11/1) |
| 2 | Nick Chubb | RB | Georgia | Chubb became a starter in the seventh game and showed speed on outside carries. | (16/9) |
| 3 | Chad Thomas | DL | Miami | Browns expected more from Thomas, but he spent most of season on the inactive list. | (4/0) |
| 4 | Antonio Callaway | WR | Florida | Callaway led the Browns with five touchdown catches and showed speed for a bright future. | (16/11) |
| 5 | Genard Avery | LB | Memphis | Avery had 4.5 sacks as a rookie. Will contend for a starting job in camp next summer. | (16/5) |
| 6 | Damian Ratley | WR | Texas A&M | Will have something to prove next summer after catching three passes in final eight games. | (13/3) |
| 6 | Simeon Thomas | CB | Louisiana | Waived on Sept. 1. He was the only player drafted by John Dorsey that did not make the 53-man roster. | (0/0) |

Baker Mayfield

**SUMMARY: With Mayfield playing like a No. 1 pick, the Browns are no longer quarterback hunting. Ward, Chubb and Avery made this much more than a one-player draft.**

# Dallas Cowboys

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 343.8 (22nd)

**RUSHING:** 122.7 (10th)

**PASSING:** 221.1 (23rd)

**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 329.3 (7th)

**RUSHING:** 84.6 (5th)

**PASSING:** 234.7 (13th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

A RATING

The Cowboys' young team made the divisional round of the playoffs on the strength of starters the team has picked up in the last five drafts, including Pro Bowl players Zack Martin, DeMarcus Lawrence, Byron Jones, Dak Prescott. Add defensive standouts Jaylon Smith, Leighton Vander Esch and Chidobe Awuzie to that list and Dallas has made a case for one of the best drafting teams in the league. Prescott, whom the Cowboys grabbed in the fourth round in 2016, would easily be the team's best pick of the last five seasons if they hadn't also drafted the NFL's rushing leader two of the last three seasons by picking Elliott in the first round of the same draft.

**Best pick:** RB Ezekiel Elliott, R1 2016 — Elliott led the NFL in rushing as a rookie in 2016 and again last season. He's averaging better than 100 yards per game through his first three seasons.

**Worst pick:** DE Charles Tapper, R4 2016 — Spent 2016 and 2017 on injured reserve and then the Cowboys cut him prior to the start of the 2018 season.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 9 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| STARTERS | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 5 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 |

If given a blind taste test, Dallas Cowboys fans would likely relish the idea of a young team with a solid record the last three seasons, made possible by a better-than-average drafting record over the last five years. The Cowboys have gone 32-16 in the regular season since picking up running back Ezekiel Elliott and Dak Prescott in the 2016 draft. But some Cowboys fans don't believe Jason Garrett is the coach to end the Super Bowl drought in Dallas — when the team went 3-5 through the first half of this season, owner Jerry Jones seemed inclined to agree.

The Cowboys' turnaround in the second half and their NFC East championship will keep Garrett in the coach's chair at least through 2019, but the club is ready for him to show he's on the brink of something bigger.

Garrett had backed his offensive coordinator, Scott Linehan, all season in the face of a fan uproar about play-calling. The Cowboys' red-zone problems haven't helped Linehan's case. But Dallas definitely made strides on offense this season after acquiring wide receiver Amari Cooper from the Raiders. Still, Linehan departed in mid-January.

Maybe the reason Dallas fans were so critical of Linehan is that they believe they have a championship-caliber defense. There's some evidence to back up that claim as the Cowboys finished seventh in total defense in the regular season.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Dak Prescott**

**Backups:** Cooper Rush, Mike White

Prescott passed for 3,885 yards and 22 touchdowns, putting him right in the middle of the league in both categories. However, like in 2016, Prescott did what he needed to do most of the time to complement star running back Ezekiel Elliott, leading Dallas to an NFC East title. The addition of Amari Cooper brought out the best in Prescott, creating high hopes for the future of the combo. Rush got into just one game in the regular season and didn't throw a pass. It's unclear how well Dallas is positioned if Prescott ever misses time due to injury.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: Ezekiel Elliott**

**Backups:** Rod Smith (UFA), FB Jamize Olawale (UFA), Darius Jackson

This season, Elliott showed he's not only a dynamic rusher, but also extremely durable and versatile. Before the Cowboys acquired Cooper, Elliott doubled as Dallas's best deep threat. Elliott finished the season with 77 receptions, more than double his previous best. And, oh by the way, he led the NFL in rushing for the second time in three seasons. The Cowboys aren't likely to spend much money on Smith, who displayed a lot of energy, but not much ability to make plays when he subbed in for Elliott. Likewise, Olawale didn't give the Cowboys many reasons to make re-signing him a priority.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: *Geoff Swaim**

**Backups:** Blake Jarwin, Dalton Schultz, Rico Gathers

Swaim and Jarwin combined for 53 catches and 549 yards, nowhere close to making up for the absence of Jason Witten, who retired in April. Witten caught 132 passes during Prescott's first two seasons. But Jarwin came on strong in Week 17 when he hauled in seven receptions for 119 yards and three touchdowns. Though promising, that won't keep the Cowboys from looking around for a more prolific pass-catching tight end in the offseason. Schultz didn't show signs of contributing much to the passing game and the experiment in converting Gathers from a basketball player to football has been inconsistent at best.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Amari Cooper, Cole Beasley (UFA), *Allen Hurns**

**Backups:** Michael Gallup, Noah Brown, Tavon Austin (UFA), *Cedrick Wilson

Dallas gave up its first-round pick in this spring's draft to acquire Cooper from the Raiders and it appears to be well worth it. Cooper caught 53 passes for 725 yards and six touchdowns in nine games for the Cowboys. Having Cooper on the roster makes fixing the position almost a non-issue. Gallup showed promise as a rookie and looks like a staple in Dallas's future plans at the position. The big question is whether or not the Cowboys will attempt to re-sign fan-favorite Beasley, who along with Austin will be a free agent.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Tyron Smith, LG Connor Williams, C *Travis Frederick, RG Zack Martin, RT La'el Collins**

**Backups:** G Xavier Su'a-Filo, C Joe Looney, T Cameron Fleming (UFA), C Adam Redmond, G/T *Marcus Martin, G/T *Dustin Stanton

Dallas was forced to shuffle its starting lineup all season beginning with Frederick's illness in the preseason. Frederick was diagnosed with Guillain-Barre Syndrome, a disease of the nervous system, in August. Although it is treatable and wasn't thought to be a career-ending condition, Frederick missed the entire season. More shuffling came up when Martin sprained an MCL and Su'a-Filo sustained multiple injuries. But despite the shuffling, Dallas had a capable offensive line throughout the season, even if it wasn't the dominant group of

**Ezekiel Elliott**
Photo by Matthew Emmons-USA TODAY Sports

past years. The offseason approach will depend on how the Cowboys read Frederick's status going forward.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE DeMarcus Lawrence (UFA), DT Maliek Collins, DT Antwaun Woods, DE Tyrone Crawford**

**Backups:** DE Taco Charlton, DL David Irving (UFA), DE Randy Gregory, DT Daniel Ross, DE Dorance Armstrong, DT Caraun Reid (UFA)

The Cowboys' top priority of the offseason will be re-signing Lawrence, who has 29 tackles for loss, plus 25 sacks in the last two seasons. Lawrence is the kind of defensive building block Dallas has to keep on the roster to continue moving toward a championship defense. Even if and when the Cowboys' re-sign Lawrence, Dallas has to add to its defensive line bullpen. Dallas will likely part ways with Irving, who has been unreliable for his entire tenure with the team. On the upside, Gregory had a bounce-back season and became a top performer on the defensive front.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: WLB Sean Lee, MLB Jaylon Smith, SLB Leighton Vander Esch**

**Backups:** LB Damien Wilson (UFA), LB Chris Covington, LB Justin March-Lillard (UFA), LB Joe Thomas

Dallas scored with its 2018 first-round draft pick as Vander Esch finished third in the NFL with 140 total tackles. Combine that with Smith's breakout season (122 tackles, six for losses), and the Cowboys are well situated going forward. The big question will be whether or not Lee comes back from a frustrating, injury-plagued season. He played in seven games in the regular season, posting 30 tackles. If Lee retires, or if the Cowboys decide they can't count on him to stay healthy, the team might have to go for a linebacker high in the draft for a second straight year.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Chidobe Awuzie, CB Byron Jones, SS Jeff Heath, FS Xavier Woods**

**Backups:** S Kavon Frazier, CB Anthony Brown, CB C.J. Goodwin, CB Jourdan Lewis, S Darian Thompson (UFA), CB *Marqueston Huff, S *Jameill Showers

Awuzie's second pro season was a success as he started 14 games and posted 71 tackles, 11 pass breakups and an interception. Jones shifted from safety to cornerback and earned a Pro Bowl selection as he made 67 stops and broke up 14 passes. Brown and Lewis were solid as well, giving the Cowboys quality depth at corner. But the safety spot is more of a question mark. Woods and Heath were good, but it's the one spot on the Dallas depth chart that lacks all-pro potential. Dallas is likely to look for a top safety in the draft or free agency.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### DEFENSIVE LINE

Whether or not DeMarcus Lawrence is re-signed, a huge factor in the situation is how badly they need to draft a pass rusher. Either way, though, David Irving's failure to get himself on the field and Taco Charlton's tendency to underachieve, mean the team needs more options.

### TIGHT END

Although Blake Jarwin did something no other Cowboys tight end has ever done, catching three touchdowns in a single game versus the Giants in Week 17, help is needed.

### SAFETY

The Cowboys have Pro Bowlers on the defensive line and potentially at linebacker. The only thing they seem to be lacking is a bona fide All-Pro at safety.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K Brett Maher, P Chris Jones, LS L.P Ladouceur (UFA)

The Cowboys took a big risk by cutting long-time, reliable kicker Dan Bailey on Sept. 1. But Maher made the bet pay off as he hit 29 of 36 field-goal attempts, including successful kicks from 62 and 59 yards. He was 6 of 7 from beyond 50 yards and almost automatic from inside the 40, nailing 16 of 18. Jones' 44.5 yards per punt and 17 downed inside the 20 weren't high in the league rankings, but he still qualifies as a strength rather than a liability. Ladouceur is a free agent, but he's spent 14 seasons in Dallas and the team likes him, so expect him to be back for 2019.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Leighton Vander Esch | LB | Boise State | Became a viable candidate for Defensive Rookie of the Year by finishing third in league with 140 tackles. | (16/11) |
| 2 | Connor Williams | G | Texas | Had mixed results in 10 games as a starter, but performed well in playoff win over Seattle. | (13/10) |
| 3 | Michael Gallup | WR | Colorado State | His connection with QB Dak Prescott grew stronger as the season progressed. | (16/8) |
| 4 | Dorance Armstrong | DE | Kansas | Helped provide depth on the defensive line, but had limited production with 13 tackles. | (15/1) |
| 4 | Dalton Schultz | TE | Stanford | Although he started seven games, Schultz didn't make the impact of a starter. | (11/7) |
| 5 | Mike White | QB | Western Kentucky | Played in the preseason, but was the Cowboys' third-string QB. | (0/0) |
| 6 | Chris Covington | LB | Indiana | Got into five games, but made only one tackle. | (5/0) |
| 6 | Cedrick Wilson | WR | Boise State | Preseason shoulder surgery kept him on injured reserve for the entire season. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Bo Scarbrough | RB | Alabama | Started the season on the Cowboys' practice squad; finished it on the Seahawks roster. | (0/0) |

Leighton Vander Esch

**SUMMARY: The draft produced four players that started at least seven games and three bona fide future full-time starters: Vander Esch, Williams and Gallup.**

# Denver Broncos

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 350.1 (19th)
**RUSHING:** 119.2 (12th)
**PASSING:** 230.9 (19th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 365.1 (22nd)
**RUSHING:** 119.6 (21st)
**PASSING:** 245.6 (20th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

C
RATING

Breaking a pattern of mediocre drafts in recent years, the Broncos restocked their roster with talent with a sterling draft class in 2018, led by outside linebacker Bradley Chubb, whose 12 sacks set a team rookie record. They've had some misses, particularly at the top of some of their previous drafts. Quarterback Paxton Lynch, their top pick is 2016, was out of football in 2018, although he has signed with the Seahawks for 2019. Linebacker Shane Ray, the top pick in 2015, was a healthy scratch in the last few weeks of this past season. From the 2014 and 2015 drafts, there are only three starters and two backups combined.

**Best Pick:** OLB Bradley Chubb, R1 2018 — Playing opposite Von Miller, Chubb's addition gives the Broncos one of the most formidable edge rushing tandems in the league.

**Worst Pick:** QB Paxton Lynch, R1 2016 — Statistically fit the NFL prototype for quarterback, but failed to measure up in his on-field performance.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 6 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 10 |
| STARTERS | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 6 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 2 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |

Like 2017, the Denver Broncos got off to a good start in 2018, winning their first two games before seeing their season crater. Denver lost six of seven games, and despite rallying to win three straight and even their record at 6-6, they tailed off again in the final month.

Denver lost its last four games, hurt by injuries to key playmakers as well as a feeble offense that scored more than 30 points in a game only once during the season. Penalties also were a problem for the Broncos, who were flagged 125 times — the second most in the league — for an average of nearly eight accepted penalties per game. The Broncos finished 6-10, a one-win improvement over their 2017 campaign, also under head coach Vance Joseph, who was fired a day after the Broncos' season-ending loss to the Los Angeles Chargers.

Joseph compiled an 11-21 record in his two seasons with the team and oversaw the first back-to-back losing campaigns by the Broncos since 1971-72. Inconsistent quarterback play, ragged third-down conversions and a lack of scoring loomed as the Broncos' biggest problems in a disappointing season. They averaged 20.6 points per game, ranking 24th in the 32-team league. That in turn put a great deal of pressure on their defense, once a strong point which gradually crumbled over the course of the season into mediocrity. The Broncos hired defensive guru Vic Fangio to turn things around..

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Case Keenum**
**Backups:** Kevin Hogan, Garrett Grayson

Keenum, a free-agent acquisition signed to a two-year, $36 million contract, had a middling campaign in his first year with the Broncos. Keenum had 17 turnovers, including 15 interceptions while throwing for 18 touchdowns and running for two scores. He too often opted for the check-down pass rather than pushing downfield options. General manager John Elway gave him only a lukewarm endorsement as Denver's 2019 quarterback, calling him Denver's quarterback at the moment. The Broncos could very well add a quarterback through the draft or free agency to at least push Keenum for the job.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: *Phillip Lindsay, FB Andy Janovich**
**Backups:** Royce Freeman, Devontae Booker

Lindsay, an undrafted free agent, emerged as a difference-maker in a sensational rookie season that saw him surpass 1,000 yards rushing before suffering a season-ending wrist fracture in the next to last game of the season. Lindsay underwent successful surgery and, though he faces a lengthy rehab, should be back in time for training camp. Freeman and Booker provide solid depth and Jonavich is an excellent lead blocker and receiving option.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: *Jeff Heuerman (UFA)**
**Backups:** Matt LaCosse, Brian Parker, Temarrick Hemingway, Jake Butt, *Troy Fumagalli

Injuries changed the face the of the tight-end position over the course of the season. Butt went down with a season-ending knee injury in September. Heuerman suffered three broken ribs and a bruised lung in Week 12 and went on season-ending injured reserve. LaCosse was signed off the New York Giants practice squad in early December last season and finished this year as the starter because of the injuries to Butt and Heuerman, both of whom had shown signs of helping the run game with their blocking and providing reliable receiving options as well.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Courtland Sutton, *Emmanuel Sanders**
**Backups:** DaeSean Hamilton, Tim Patrick, River Cracraft, *Andre Holmes (UFA), *Jordan Taylor

The Broncos began the season with Demaryius Thomas and Sanders as their starting wideout tandem. But with the team in the midst of a downward spiral, Thomas was traded to Houston and Sanders weeks later ruptured an Achilles' tendon in practice, and the Broncos turned to their young cadre of receivers to get them through the season. They got valuable experience down the stretch and Sutton in particular made strides in his route running and deep ball receiving.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Garett Bolles, LG Connor McGovern, C *Matt Paradis (UFA), RG *Ron Leary, RT Jared Veldheer (UFA)**
**Backups:** *Max Garcia (UFA), Nico Falah, Sam Jones, Gino Gradkowski (UFA)

The Broncos saw three starters on the offensive line go down with season-ending injuries: Paradis, Leary and Garcia, all of whom finished out the season on injured reserve. Despite the upheaval, the Broncos' reconfigured line sustained a running attack that produced a 1,000-yard rusher in Lindsay and provided solid pass protection. But the Broncos will have decisions to make on whether to bring back Paradis, a pending free agent, who has anchored the line for the past four years. Veldheer and Turner also are among the Broncos' free agents meriting consideration to return.

**Phillip Lindsay**
Photo by Isaiah J. Downing-USA TODAY Sports

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Derek Wolfe, NT Domata Peko (UFA), DE Adam Gotsis**

**Backups:** Zach Kerr (UFA), Shelby Harris, DeMarcus Walker

The veteran laden defensive line was stout against the run, clogging the rushing lanes and getting good push up the middle on passing downs. Peko and Harris are key free agents for the Broncos, who have to decide whether they want to keep one of their strongest units intact.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Von Miller, OLB Bradley Chubb, ILB Josey Jewell, ILB Todd Davis**

**Backups:** Brandon Marshall (UFA), Shaquil Barrett (UFA), Shane Ray (UFA), Jeff Holland, Joe Jones, Keishawn Bierria, Deiontrez Mount (UFA), *Jerrol Garcia-Williams

Another strong point in the Broncos defense, especially on the edges, where Miller and Chubb formed the league's top pass rushing tandem with a combined 26.5 sacks. Jewell moved into the starting lineup in the last half of the season after a knee injury slowed Marshall, who is a pending free agent. The Broncos had quality backups on the edge in Barrett and Ray, who are both free agents. It will be difficult to bring one or both of them back because of the cost. As a group, the Broncos' linebackers struggled in pass coverage and were especially vulnerable covering tight ends.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Chris Harris Jr., CB *Bradley Roby (UFA), S Darian Stewart, S Justin Simmons**

**Backups:** CB Tramaine Brock (UFA), CB Jamar Taylor (UFA), CB Isaac Yiadom, CB Brendan Langley, CB Craig Mager, S Dymonte Thomas, S Su'a Cravens, S Trey Marshall, S Will Parks, CB Horace Richardson

Repeatedly a vulnerability for the Broncos, especially after Harris went down with a season ending fibula fracture in early December. Roby had an up and down season, denying a completion on one play and giving up a big play the next. The Broncos would be interested in bringing Roby back, but at the right price. Simmons established himself this season as a ball-hawking safety and Parks played well when he stepped in for the injured Stewart for significant periods this past season.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K Brandon McManus, P Colby Wadman, KR Devontae Booker, KR River Cracraft, LS Casey Krieter

McManus stands out as one of the Broncos' most consistent kickers who also possesses a strong leg. Wadman established himself as the punter after he was brought in to replace Marquette King, a free-agent addition who was released after struggling with his punting during the first month of the season.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list*

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### QUARTERBACK

Case Keenum does not appear to be the Broncos' long-term answer at quarterback, meaning they'll need to try to develop one to take their offense to the next level.

### CORNERBACK

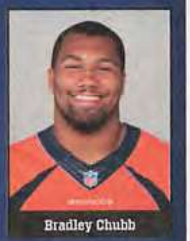
The Broncos struggled at times to prevent big plays. A lock-down corner opposite Chris Harris Jr. would help Denver deny the big gainer while maintaining coverage long enough for their pass rush to act as a disrupter.

### WIDE RECEIVER

The Broncos are still in need of playmakers on the offensive side of the ball.

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Bradley Chubb | OLB | North Carolina State | Emerged as defensive force with a team rookie record 12 sacks this season. | (16/16) |
| 2 | Courtland Sutton | WR | Southern Methodist | Development accelerated after Demaryius Thomas was traded; can stretch the field, but needs to work on reducing drops. | (16/9) |
| 3 | Royce Freeman | RB | Oregon | Provided effective change of pace in the backfield to Phillip Lindsay. | (14/8) |
| 3 | Isaac Yiadom | CB | Boston College | Showed promise in only rookie start with an interception in the season finale. | (13/1) |
| 4 | Josey Jewell | ILB | Iowa | Thrust into starting lineup midway through the season because of an injury to Brandon Marshall. | (16/9) |
| 4 | DaeSean Hamilton | WR | Penn State | Moved into starting lineup after season ending injury to Emmanuel Sanders. | (14/5) |
| 5 | Troy Fumagalli | TE | Wisconsin | Spent rookie season on injured reserve because of a sports hernia. | (0/0) |
| 6 | Sam Jones | G | Arizona State | Still in developmental stage; saw little action as a rookie. | (5/0) |
| 6 | Keishawn Bierria | ILB | Washington | Made an impact on special teams, appearing in all 16 games. | (16/0) |
| 7 | David Williams | RB | Arkansas | Was signed off the Broncos practice squad by Jacksonville last fall. | (0/0) |



Bradley Chubb

**SUMMARY: One of the most impactful draft classes in club history with the top six players selected in the starting lineup by the team's regular-season finale.**

# Detroit Lions

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 327.3 (24th)
**RUSHING:** 103.8 (23rd)
**PASSING:** 223.5 (20th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 335.0 (10th)
**RUSHING:** 110.1 (10th)
**PASSING:** 224.9 (8th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

C
RATING

In three years as Lions general manager, Bob Quinn has done a good job at the top of his drafts finding starters, but he's yet to land a Pro Bowler. All three of Quinn's first-round picks are trending toward second contracts, but the Lions haven't had much luck on Day 3. Martin Mayhew was the general manager in 2014-15, where he had colossal misses in the first two rounds. Overall, the Lions have done a fair job with their draft picks, but they haven't found any superstars and last year's coaching change left them with a bunch of players who didn't fit the new system.

**Best pick:** S Quandre Diggs, R6 2015 — Diggs saw time as a nickel cornerback in his first two years and made the switch full-time to safety this fall. He tied for the team lead with three interceptions and was a Pro Bowl alternate on an improved defense.

**Worst pick:** TE Eric Ebron, R1 2014 — Ebron had an excellent season for the Indianapolis Colts last year, but the Lions picked him over Aaron Donald and Odell Beckham Jr. Enough said.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 8 | 7 | 10 | 9 | 6 |
| STARTERS | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| BACKUPS | 1 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 4 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

A year after they fired Jim Caldwell for underachieving with a 9-7 record, the Lions' 2018 season was a major disappointment after they won just six games and finished in last place in the NFC North under first-year head coach Matt Patricia.

The Lions got off to a slow start as players were hesitant to buy into Patricia's ways, and when the defense finally turned a corner after the midseason trade for Damon Harrison, the offense was decimated by its own departures due to injuries (Kerryon Johnson, Marvin Jones Jr.) and a big trade (Golden Tate).

Matthew Stafford regressed as a quarterback, coordinators Jim Bob Cooter (offense) and Joe Marciano (special teams) were fired, and Ziggy Ansah lasted just 146 snaps before his shoulder gave out while playing on the franchise tag.

Not everything went wrong for the Lions last year. Johnson and Kenny Golladay are two promising young building blocks on offense, and the defense played increasingly well as the season went on, especially up front. But 2019 will be a telling year for Patricia and fourth-year general manager Bob Quinn, both of whom will be on the hot seat to produce bigger and better results.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Matthew Stafford**
**Backup:** Matt Cassel (UFA)

Stafford had a disappointing 2018, but with four years left on the $135 million extension he signed last summer, the Lions remain committed to him going forward. Stafford struggled with turnovers early in the season and played through a back injury for the final month. He threw for less than 4,000 yards for the first time in a full season in his career, and saw fans turn against him at Ford Field. He'll have a new offense to run in 2019 and must be better if the Lions are going to contend for the playoffs.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: *Kerryon Johnson**
**Backups:** Zach Zenner (UFA), LeGarrette Blount (UFA), Theo Riddick, Nick Bellore

For the first time since Barry Sanders roamed the Silverdome, the Lions appear to have a difference-maker at running back. Johnson averaged 5.4 yards per carry and led the team in rushing despite missing six games with a knee injury. He's a complete back, though injury concerns could limit his workload going forward. Blount appears to be on his last legs at 32-years-old, and the Lions probably will look for a replacement this offseason. It could be Zenner, though he ran well enough late in the season, and does enough things on special teams, that he should draw free-agent interest. Riddick is not the receiving threat he once was and might have to fight for a roster spot next year.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Levine Toilolo (UFA)**
**Backups:** Luke Willson (UFA), *Michael Roberts, Jerome Cunningham

The Lions had arguably the worst group of tight ends in the NFL. They used five different players at the position, and those five combined for 43 catches, 450 yards and four touchdowns, though they did contribute to the success of the run game. The Lions misjudged the tight-end market last spring, when they whiffed on free agents after cutting Eric Ebron. Toilolo flashed as a receiver over the final month, but neither he nor Willson is likely to re-sign. Roberts has potential as a red-zone threat, but he hasn't finished his first two NFL seasons because of injury and suspension.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Kenny Golladay, *Marvin Jones Jr.**
**Backups:** TJ Jones (UFA), *Bruce Ellington (UFA), Brandon Powell, Andy Jones, Chris Lacy

What looked like one of the deepest receiver corps in the NFL going into the season was one of the league's thinnest by year's end. Golladay emerged as a borderline No. 1 receiver. But the Lions traded dependable slot receiver Golden Tate without having a replacement, and Marvin Jones Jr. had a disappointing year that ended with a knee injury. Young receivers Powell, Andy Jones and Lacy did some good things in limited action, but they don't come with a ton of upside.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Taylor Decker, LG Frank Ragnow, C Graham Glasgow, RG *T.J. Lang, RT Rick Wagner**
**Backups:** G Kenny Wiggins, T Tyrell Crosby, T *Andrew Donnal, G Joe Dahl, C Leo Koloamatangi

The Lions had an improved line in 2018, one that protected Stafford well early in the season and opened holes in the run game. But the group was just average overall. Both Decker and Ragnow look like long-term keepers, but the Lions have a decision to make at right guard. Lang won't be back at his current salary, and he might not be back at all given his health problems (a neck injury this year and the sixth diagnosed concussion of his career). Wiggins is no more than a stopgap, so the Lions will have to decide if Crosby can move inside from tackle or if they need to go outside the organization to find a replacement.

**Kenny Golladay**
Photo by Mark Konezny-USA TODAY Sports

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE *Da'Shawn Hand, DT Damon Harrison, DT *A'Shawn Robinson, DE *Ziggy Ansah (UFA)**

**Backups:** DE Romeo Okwara, DT Ricky Jean Francois (UFA), DE Kerry Hyder, DE Eric Lee, DE Mitchell Loewen, DT John Atkins

The Lions took care of what would have been a huge need this offseason when they swung an October trade for Harrison. One of the best interior run-stuffers in the NFL, Harrison had an undeniable impact on the Lions defense, and along with Hand and Robinson gives the team a solid foundation to build upon. The biggest question is the right end position, and what more the Lions can do to get after quarterbacks. Ansah barely played because of injuries and is likely done in Detroit, and while Okwara played well in his absence, he's not a high-level pass rusher.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Devon Kennard, MLB Jarrad Davis, OLB Christian Jones**

**Backups:** OLB *Jalen Reeves-Maybin, OLB *Steve Longa, OLB Eli Harold (UFA), Miles Killebrew, MLB Kelvin Sheppard (UFA), MLB Trevor Bates, OLB Nick Grigsby

Davis was one of the Lions' most improved players in his second NFL season, though he's still a bit of a work in progress. He was a factor as a pass rusher (six sacks) and is a physical force. The Lions signed Kennard and Jones on the first day of free agency last year, so there's probably not another big signing coming, but they could add depth and playmaking to the position in the draft. Kennard had a nice season as a pass rusher, but he's not a true difference maker.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Darius Slay, CB Nevin Lawson, S Quandre Diggs, S Glover Quin**

**Backups:** S Tracy Walker, S Tavon Wilson, S Charles Washington, CB Teez Tabor, CB Marcus Cooper (UFA), CB Mike Ford, CB Dee Virgin, CB Andre Chachere, CB *Jamal Agnew, CB DeShawn Shead

Slay was picked for his second straight Pro Bowl, but he didn't play consistently at the same high level that he did a year ago. Diggs, in his first full season at safety, was probably the Lions' best defensive back, and Walker played well enough in spot duty that the Lions appear ready to move on from the aging Quin. Tabor, a second-round pick in 2017, has yet to develop into even a capable backup, and Agnew missed too much time to know if he can be a good nickel corner.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### DEFENSIVE END

Sack leader Romeo Okwara should be back as a restricted free agent, but the Lions need a pass rusher who can get regular pressure on opposing quarterbacks.

### TIGHT END

The Lions cut Eric Ebron last March and couldn't get free agents to take their money. They had one of the worst tight-end groups in the NFL in 2018.

### CORNERBACK

The Teez Tabor experiment didn't work and Nevin Lawson has zero interceptions in five seasons. The Lions need a No. 2 cornerback.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K Matt Prater, P Sam Martin, LS Don Muhlbach (UFA)

The Lions were so bad on special teams this year they fired Joe Marciano in early November, and their once stable kicking game showed signs of cracks. Prater made 28 of 32 field goals and is in no danger of losing his job, but he wasn't as reliable from distance and he missed a game-winning field goal late in the season. Martin has been a disappointment since signing his contract extension in 2016, though he was failed by his coverage units often this year. The Lions probably will kick the tires on new long snappers this spring for the second time in three years, but the return of a healthy Agnew and a new coordinator should be enough to improve the return game.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Frank Ragnow | G | Arkansas | Played all but one snap this season. Had ups and downs, but looks like a long-term starter. | (16/16) |
| 2 | Kerryon Johnson | RB | Auburn | Transformed the Lions' league-worst running game into a respectable unit before season-ending knee injury. | (10/7) |
| 3 | Tracy Walker | S | Louisiana-Lafayette | Was Lions' No. 3 safety this year but could take over for Glover Quin in 2019. | (16/0) |
| 4 | Da'Shawn Hand | DL | Alabama | Had three sacks, two forced fumbles as regular contributor at the Lions' most improved position. | (13/8) |
| 5 | Tyrell Crosby | T | Oregon | Started one game at right tackle and as a sixth lineman, where he held his own. | (10/2) |
| 7 | Nick Bawden | FB | San Diego | Spent all season on injured reserve after tearing his ACL in OTAs. | (0/0) |

Frank Ragnow

**SUMMARY: They hit on first four picks and got a draft-day steal in Hand. There are three first-year starters, and two others who should be in time.**

# Green Bay Packers

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 369.1 (12th)

**RUSHING:** 104.2 (22nd)

**PASSING:** 264.9 (9th)

**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 354.4 (18th)

**RUSHING:** 119.9 (22nd)

**PASSING:** 234.5 (12th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

D- RATING

The Packers are in their current predicament because of a number of poor drafts by former general manager Ted Thompson. Thompson's draft-and-develop philosophy worked great when his drafts delivered talent that could be developed. The 2015 draft should have been front and center on this year's team – experienced players on rookie contracts. Instead, the only player on the team was inside linebacker Jake Ryan, a projected starter who spent the season on injured reserve. Their first-round pick in 2014, safety Ha Ha Clinton-Dix, was traded to Washington. Their first-round pick in 2015, cornerback Damarious Randall, was traded to Cleveland. In 2017, Thompson bypassed outside linebacker T.J. Watt for cornerback Kevin King. King has zero sacks, one interception and seven passes defensed in 15 games.

**Best pick:** WR Davante Adams, R2 2014 — Adams emerged as one of the NFL's top receivers. He's not tall and he doesn't have elite speed but he's a virtuoso at the line of scrimmage.

**Worst pick:** CB Quinten Rollins, R2 2015 — A one-year wonder at Miami (Ohio), the former college basketball star wasn't fast enough before tearing his Achilles in 2017.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 9 | 8 | 7 | 10 | 11 |
| STARTERS | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 2 | 4 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

With the return of Aaron Rodgers from last year's broken collarbone, the Packers were deemed a championship contender entering the season. Instead, following a home loss to the last-place Arizona Cardinals that sent the Packers to 4-7-1, longtime head coach Mike McCarthy was fired and replaced on an interim basis by Joe Philbin. The Packers went 2-2 under Philbin and finished 6-9-1 – their first back-to-back losing seasons since 1990-91. Matt LaFleur was hired as McCarthy's replacement.

It certainly didn't help that Rodgers failed to play like a two-time MVP. While he threw for 4,442 yards, set an NFL record with 402 attempts between interceptions and led the league in touchdown-to-interception ratio (25 touchdowns, two interceptions), he also completed only 62.3 percent of his passes — the second-worst rate of his 11-year starting tenure. Other than Davante Adams, who finished sixth in in the league in receptions, seventh in yards and second in touchdowns, he didn't have a reliable receiver. The team's splash signing in free agency, tight end Jimmy Graham, made only a modest contribution.

Rodgers' notwithstanding, the Packers' best position group should have been their defensive line. Instead, Muhammad Wilkerson (missed 13 games), Mike Daniels (missed six games) and Kenny Clark (missed four games) all ended up on injured reserve.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Aaron Rodgers**

**Backups:** DeShone Kizer, Tim Boyle.

Rodgers owns the best passer rating in NFL history. Last year, his rating of 97.6 ranked only 13th in the league. He ranked only 26th in completion percentage and 21st in touchdown percentage. Whatever the reason, the Packers need the league's highest-paid player to play like the league's best player. Kizer, who struggled in replacing Rodgers in Week 1 against Chicago and Week 17 against Detroit, has potential.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: *Aaron Jones**

**Backups:** Jamaal Williams, Kapri Bibbs, Lavon Coleman, *Tra Carson, FB Danny Vitale

Jones showed vast improvement in the passing game following a rocky rookie season as a receiver and a blocker. Jones led the league with 5.47 yards per carry and had one of the best 10-yard run rates in the league. However, after twice being sidelined by MCL injuries as a rookie, Jones missed most of the final three games of the season with another MCL injury. Williams does everything well but isn't nearly as dynamic as Jones.

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Jimmy Graham**

**Backups:** Lance Kendricks (UFA), Marcedes Lewis (UFA), Robert Tonyan

The Packers essentially dumped popular receiver Jordy Nelson so they could sign Graham. While Graham's 55 receptions were the third-most in franchise history by a tight end, he offered no big-play production and was a surprising non-factor in the red zone. It wouldn't be a surprise if the Packers released him in a cost-cutting move. Kendricks did well in a do-it-all role. Lewis, however, seemingly was forgotten despite his strong history as a blocker and possession receiver with Jacksonville.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Davante Adams, Randall Cobb (UFA), *Geronimo Allison**

**Backups:** Marquez Valdes-Scantling, Equanimeous St. Brown, Jake Kumerow, *Trevor Davis, Allen Lazard

Adams was a one-man receiving corps with 111 receptions for 1,386 yards and 13 touchdowns. Adams signed a huge contract late last season and rewarded the Packers by blowing past the 1,000-yard barrier for the first time in his career. Cobb missed a large stretch of the season with a hamstring injury. Through four games, Allison was on track for a 1,000-yard season. A core-muscle injury sidelined him for the final nine games. The injuries forced rookies Valdes-Scantling and St. Brown into too-big roles. They had their moments but never consistently flourished. Without Davis, the special teams were a disaster.

### OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT David Bakhtiari, LG Lane Taylor, C Corey Linsley, RG *Byron Bell, RT Bryan Bulaga**

**Backups:** T Jason Spriggs, T *Kyle Murphy, G Justin McCray, G Lucas Patrick, G/T Alex Light, G Nico Siragusa, G/T Adam Pankey

Bakhtiari was named first-team All-Pro, making him, comically, a three-time All-Pro but one-time Pro Bowler. A fourth-round pick in 2013, he consistently beats his man one-on-one and probably had his best season as a run blocker. Linsley played every snap for the second consecutive season and is one of the league's more underrated interior linemen. The guard play was poor. Perhaps it was the offseason ankle surgery, but Taylor never looked like the player who thrived during his first two years as a starter. The right guard merry-go-round probably will continue next season. The Packers need better guard play and a young tackle to groom behind Bulaga.

### DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DL *Mike Daniels, NT *Kenny Clark, DL *Muhammad Wilkerson (UFA)**

**Backups:** DL Dean Lowry, NT Tyler

**Davante Adams**
Photo by Jeff Hanisch-USA TODAY Sports

Lancaster, DL Montravius Adams, DL James Looney, DL Fadol Brown

The Packers signed Wilkerson, a former Pro Bowler with big-time pass-rushing production, but he suffered an ankle injury in Week 3. Daniels missed the final six games with a foot injury. Clark, who was having a Pro Bowl season with six sacks, missed the final four games with an elbow injury. If there's a silver lining, the Packers found depth. Lowry was superb, Adams flashed playmaking ability. Lancaster, an undrafted rookie, was a horse inside and easily led the unit in tackles per snap.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Clay Matthews (UFA), OLB *Nick Perry, ILB Blake Martinez, ILB *Jake Ryan (UFA)**

**Backups:** OLB Kyler Fackrell, OLB Reggie Gilbert, OLB James Crawford, OLB Kendall Donnerson, ILB Antonio Morrison, ILB Oren Burks

The Packers got almost nothing from the highly paid tandem of Matthews (3.5 sacks) and Perry (1.5 sacks). There's a chance neither will be back, with the 32-year-old Matthews set to be a first-timer in free agency and Perry due a hefty roster bonus in March. The saving grace was Kyler Fackrell. A third-round pick in 2016, Fackrell looked like a bust after two quiet seasons and a slow start this season. He had 10.5 sacks. Martinez led the NFL with 144 tackles last season and was second this season with a matching 144 tackles. He led the team with 10 tackles for losses. Without Ryan, the hard-hitting Morrison beat out this year's third-round pick, Burks.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB *Kevin King, CB Jaire Alexander, S Tramon Williams, S Kentrell Brice**

**Backups:** CB Bashaud Breeland (UFA), CB Josh Jackson, CB Tony Brown, CB *Davon House (UFA), CB *Will Redmond, S Josh Jones, S Eddie Pleasant (UFA), S *Raven Greene, S *Ibrahcim Campbell (UFA), S Natrell Jamerson

The Packers have invested heavily at cornerback, with King their first pick in 2017 and Alexander and Jackson their first two picks in 2018. King can't stay healthy, having played in only 15 of a possible 32 regular-season games. Alexander was asked to match up with the opponents' No. 1 receiver at times this season but also missed three games with injuries. Bubbling with confidence, he's got a chance to be special. Jackson played all 16 games and was a penalty machine. Breeland, a four-year starter with the Redskins, played well when healthy but played in only seven games. Williams started the season at cornerback but moved to safety after former first-round pick Ha Ha Clinton-Dix was traded to Washington. Brice can't stay healthy and couldn't tackle. Jones, a second-round pick last year, has been far too unreliable. Green Bay, usually among the leaders in interceptions, picked off only seven passes. Three of those were by Clinton-Dix and two were by Breeland.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### TIGHT END

The Packers need stability and playmaking ability at tight end after one-year forays with Jared Cook, Martellus Bennett and Jimmy Graham.

### GUARD

After letting T.J. Lang go in free agency following the 2016 season, the Packers have used stopgap starters Jahri Evans (2017) and Byron Bell (2018).

### OUTSIDE LINEBACKER

By continually ignoring this spot, the Packers have no one in the pipeline to replace Clay Matthews and Nick Perry. With the 12th pick of the draft, this would be a prime opportunity.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K Mason Crosby, P JK Scott, KOR/PR *Trevor Davis, LS Hunter Bradley

Special teams were a disaster. The normally reliable Crosby missed kicks that would have beaten Minnesota in Week 2 and forced overtime against Arizona in Week 13, plus missed a total of four kicks in a Week 5 loss at Detroit. Scott, the fifth-round pick, uncorked bomb after bomb during training camp but faltered as the season progressed. He finished 26th in net punting; the man he replaced, Justin Vogel, finished seventh last season. With Davis missing 14 games, Green Bay returners fumbled eight times and never tilted the field. After a rocky training camp, Bradley, a seventh-round rookie, was merely OK.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Jaire Alexander | CB | Louisville | Whatever the challenge, Alexander was up for it. He led the team with 11 passes defensed. | (13/11) |
| 2 | Josh Jackson | CB | Iowa | Finished second on the team with 10 passes defensed but fourth among all corners with eight penalties. | (16/10) |
| 3 | Oren Burks | ILB | Vanderbilt | Billed as a potential coverage linebacker, the Packers wound up using a safety in that role. | (14/4) |
| 4 | J'Mon Moore | WR | Missouri | Dropped passes and missed assignments sent Moore from the first receiver drafted to the last one to play. | (12/0) |
| 5. | Cole Madison | G | Washington State | Participated in offseason practices but never showed up for training camp due to personal reasons. | (0/0) |
| 5 | JK Scott | P | Alabama | He seemed to hit the rookie wall and finished 22nd in gross average and 26th in net average. | (16/0) |
| 5 | Marquez Valdes-Scantling | WR | South Florida | The 19th of 34 receivers drafted, he finished sixth in receptions and yards. | (16/10) |
| 6 | Equanimeous St. Brown | WR | Notre Dame | Was the 26th receiver selected. He ranked 13th among them in catches. | (12/7) |
| 7 | James Looney | DL | California | Barely played even with the depth chart slammed by injuries. | (3/0) |
| 7 | Hunter Bradley | LS | Mississippi State | Bradley barely won the job in training camp but had only one terrible snap. | (16/0) |
| 7 | Kendall Donnerson | OLB | Southeast Missouri | An athletic edge rusher, Donnerson is a project worth developing. | (0/0) |

Jaire Alexander

**SUMMARY: Running his first draft, Brian Gutekunst might have hit a home run with Alexander, but the jury is out on his next five picks.**

# Houston Texans

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 362.6 (15th)

**RUSHING:** 126.3 (8th)

**PASSING:** 236.3 (17th)

**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 343.1 (12th)

**RUSHING:** 82.7 (3rd)

**PASSING:** 260.4 (28th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

The Texans have put together an interesting run of draft picks the past five seasons, with the 2018 draft class falling on new general manager Brian Gaine. The start of the 2014 draft class is the beginning of the Bill O'Brien era and they have key core players in outside linebacker Jadeveon Clowney, inside linebackers Benardrick McKinney and Zach Cunningham, nose tackle D.J. Reader, center Nick Martin, wide receiver Will Fuller V and quarterback Deshaun Watson. That is a strong core of players that has seen both Clowney and McKinney lock up All-Pro and Pro Bowl selections. The growth of players like Justin Reid, Keke Coutee, D'Onta Foreman and Julién Davenport could make this five-year stretch an even better one for the Texans.

**Best pick:** QB Deshaun Watson, R1 2017 — Former Texans general manager Rick Smith knew the Texans needed a difference-maker and made the deal to move up to land the talented quarterback from Clemson.

**Worst pick:** G Xavier Su'a-Filo, R2 2014 — The Su'a-Filo selection couldn't have been more of a miss to start off the O'Brien era in Houston.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 10 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| STARTERS | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| BACKUPS | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 5 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 5 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

The Houston Texans' 2018 season can be described in various ways: impressive, hard-fought, gritty, etc. As admirable of a season it was, with the Texans bouncing back from an 0-3 start to finish the season 11-5 and winning another AFC South championship, it ultimately wasn't enough for the team to prevail once the playoffs rolled around. Andrew Luck and the Indianapolis Colts marched straight forward and shut out a Deshaun Watson-led offense for three quarters in a highly-touted wild-card matchup, bringing the season to an end with a 21-7 loss at NRG Stadium.

Throughout the season, Houston's offense had been a fairly steady ship with the Texans ending the year in the middle of the pack, finishing 11th in points per game and 15th in yards per game. Most of the offense's success can be attributed to the return of Watson and his steady progression throughout the season. On the other side of the spectrum, there is still plenty of room for improvement. Throughout the year, the pass protection was the Achilles heel of the offense, contributing to too many hits and off-schedule plays by Watson.

Defensively, this Texans unit heads into an offseason where key decisions need to be made relating to the futures of star players Jadeveon Clowney and Tyrann Mathieu. Both are free agents and ideally general manager Brian Gaine would like to work out a deal with both players. Clowney has been noted several times as an integral piece to the front seven, let alone the defense entirely, while Mathieu helped shore up a Texans secondary that struggled with injuries and overall efficiency in his first season in Houston.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Deshaun Watson**

**Backups:** Brandon Weeden (UFA), Joe Webb (UFA)

After his 2017 season was cut short, Watson bounced back with an exceptional season solidifying his status as the key piece of the franchise moving forward. There are still plenty areas of improvement for Watson to make over the offseason, but it is established that from now on every move made within the organization should center around what helps Watson continue to grow as a player.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: Lamar Miller**

**Backups:** Alfred Blue (UFA), D'Onta Foreman, Buddy Howell

Although Miller is a steady presence who has managed to remain relatively healthy over the past few seasons, he still leaves much to be desired with his inconsistency in finding running lanes and lack of ability to make defenders miss in the open field.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Ryan Griffin**

**Backups:** Jordan Thomas, Jordan Akins

Last offseason, it was evident that Gaine made it a point to revamp the tight end group with his selection of rookies Thomas and Akins in the 2018 NFL Draft. So far, both players have shown lots of promise this past season to where the franchise feels confident moving forward with both players.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: DeAndre Hopkins, *Will Fuller**

**Backups:** *Demaryius Thomas, Keke Coutee, Deandre Carter, Vyncint Smith, Steven Mitchell Jr.

The wide receiver group is an interesting one. We all know what Hopkins is capable of and the numbers he puts up. The questions come up outside of him. The entire group has suffered from injuries this offseason with Fuller suffering a torn ACL in the middle of the season while his replacement, serviceable veteran, Demaryius Thomas, suffered an Achilles injury towards the very end of the season. On top of that, rookie Coutee has proven to be a valuable commodity when healthy, but he missed a majority of the season with a nagging hamstring injury.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Julién Davenport, LG Senio Kelemete, C Nick Martin, RG Zach Fulton, RT Kendall Lamm (UFA)**

**Backups:** T *Seantrel Henderson (UFA), T Martinas Rankin, C/G Greg Mancz, T Roderick Johnson

Houston's offensive line is one that has been heavily scrutinized, and rightfully so. They were among one of the worst offensive lines in the NFL a year ago, while this past season Watson suffered from being sacked a season-high 62 times. So who does the blame go to? Everyone wants to simplify the issue and point fingers at specific pieces of personnel on the offensive line, but signs point toward head coach Bill O'Brien and his coaching staff feeling relatively confident in the pieces they have.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMAN

**Starters: DE J.J. Watt, NT Brandon Dunn (UFA), DE D.J. Reader**

**Backups:** DE Christian Covington (UFA), DE Angelo Blackson (UFA), DE Carlos Watkins, DE Joel Heath (RFA)

An underrated strength of the Texans

**DeAndre Hopkins**
Photo by Troy Taormina-USA TODAY Sports

defensive unit, the defensive line group is one that the organization has slowly developed over the years and has had confidence in seeing how prospects pan out. The headline this year was Watt with his potential candidacy to be the league's Comeback Player of the Year, but not enough can be said about the rest of the unit's growth and maturity. Reader has continuously shown his versatility and ability to anchor the line since Vince Wilfork's retirement a few years back.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Jadeveon Clowney (UFA), ILB Benardrick McKinney, ILB Zach Cunningham, OLB Whitney Mercilus**

**Backups:** OLB *Brennan Scarlett, ILB Dylan Cole, ILB *Brian Peters (UFA), ILB Josh Keyes (UFA), ILB Tyrell Adams, ILB Peter Kalambayi, OLB Duke Ejiofor

Same as the defensive line group, the linebacker unit is one of the strengths of this defense. On the inside, McKinney has been the solidified leader holding down the middle for a few seasons now while Cunningham continues to grow as a promising young player. Cole is another promising young player when healthy, but injuries have plagued him for his first two years. The outside linebackers are still a strong group that has otherwise arrived at an interesting place this year. Clowney once again proved his value to the defense, but it is unknown if he and the Texans can reach an agreement on a new contract. Mercilus has proven in the past that he can be a premiere pass rusher, but this year he was relatively a non-factor in most games therefore creating murmurs about his future on the team.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Johnathan Joseph, CB Kareem Jackson (UFA), S Tyrann Mathieu (UFA), S Justin Reid**

**Backups:** CB Shareece Wright (UFA), CB Aaron Colvin, CB *Kayvon Webster (UFA), S Andre Hal, S A.J. Moore, S A.J. Hendy, S *Mike Tyson

The Texans' defensive back group is one of the biggest question marks as it stands today. The combination of an aging Joseph, the uncertainty of Jackson and Mathieu's futures with the team, and the disappearance of Colvin leaves a lot of work for the Texans to do this offseason. Joseph is still serviceable, but at the age of 34, how long can he keep that up? Not everyone can be Terence Newman. Jackson was having an All-Pro season at safety until switching back to the star position due to Colvin being injured, who looked to be a solid addition before injuries developed.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### CORNERBACK

Injuries to Kevin Johnson, Kayvon Webster, Johnathan Joseph and Jermaine Kelly Jr. put the cornerback position in a tailspin early in the 2018 season.

### RIGHT TACKLE

Kendall Lamm was adequate but they need more at the position moving forward.

### RUNNING BACK

This position group has been ignored long enough and the Texans opted only to use Lamar Miller and Alfred Blue in the running game in 2018, which is not the most electric group in the NFL.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K Ka'imi Fairbairn, P Trevor Daniel, KR/PR Deandre Carter, LS Jon Weeks

This unit improved drastically this past season, and a lot of credit has to go to the arrival of special teams coach Brad Seely. It is safe to say that he has turned this unit around with the Texans ranking sixth in special teams by Pro Football Focus and fifth by Football Outsiders. Take that for what it's worth, but at the very least it is indicative of the unit's improvement this past year. Fairbairn had a Pro Bowl-caliber season as he made 37 of 42 kicks (88.1 percent), Trevor Daniel handled the pressure of living in the shadows of Shane Lechler by tying for second in the league for punts inside the 20-yard line, and Carter proved to be a good pickup by displaying his value as a returner.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | Justin Reid | S | Stanford | Was a difference maker in the Texans' secondary; made himself a starter. | (16/12) |
| 3 | Martinas Rankin | T | Mississippi State | Struggled as a tackle; will make the move to guard in 2019. | (16/4) |
| 3 | Jordan Akins | TE | Central Florida | A good receiving threat, also filled in as an H-Back when needed. | (16/6) |
| 4 | Keke Coutee | WR | Texas Tech | Injuries derailed his rookie season but he can be a difference-maker in the offense. | (6/2) |
| 6 | Duke Ejiofor | OLB | Wake Forest | Texans found another edge player that can help; was a plus as a pass rusher as a rookie. | (12/0) |
| 6 | Jordan Thomas | TE | Mississippi State | Team's tight end of the future; has to improve as a run blocker. | (16/10) |
| 6 | Peter Kalambayi | LB | Stanford | Plus special teams player and depth inside linebacker. | (15/0) |
| 7 | Jermaine Kelly Jr. | CB | San Jose State | Spent the season on injured reserve. | (0/0) |

Keke Coutee

**SUMMARY: The Texans found a way to turn a draft class with no first- or second-round selections into one of their most productive draft classes in recent seasons.**

# Indianapolis Colts

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 386.2 (7th)
**RUSHING:** 107.4 (20th)
**PASSING:** 278.8 (6th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 339.4 (11th)
**RUSHING:** 101.6 (8th)
**PASSING:** 237.8 (16th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

C RATING

One excellent draft doesn't quite make up for three discouraging returns under former general manager Ryan Grigson, who was fired after 2016. Chris Ballard has found capable young players in two drafts, an especially promising trend when considering how productive his most recent class has been. Quenton Nelson provided the nasty edge as advertised at left guard and linebacker Darius Leonard became an immediate leader, although some NFL experts thought he was a second-round reach from a small school. Sixteen of Ballard's 19 selections have started for the Colts. That's a marked improvement from having just three starters out of 21 players chosen in Grigson's last three years.

**Best pick:** LB Darius Leonard, R2 2018 — The NFL tackle leader with 163 total stops did it all. He had seven sacks, four forced fumbles and eight passes defended.

**Worst pick:** S T.J. Green, R2 2016 — Eleven starts in 31 games for two seasons were proof that Green was a bust. He signed with Seattle, but didn't play and opted to retire, citing a lack of desire.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 5 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 11 |
| STARTERS | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 3 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

Projected among the NFL's worst teams coming off a 4-12 implosion and led by a coach who landed the job only after Josh McDaniels reneged on his hiring, the Indianapolis Colts didn't exactly inspire with a 1-5 start under head coach Frank Reich. But the Colts rebounded under Reich's confident, steady leadership with nine wins in 10 games to become just the third team in NFL history to make the playoffs after that humbling start.

Quarterback Andrew Luck returned healthy from a 2017 season lost to shoulder surgery, and for the first time in his seven-year career had a solid offensive line that developed into one of the league's best. Luck took 18 sacks, fewest in the NFL, and led an offense that finished seventh in total yards and fifth in points scored.

A defense thought to be lacking in playmakers found a leader in NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year candidate Darius Leonard, a second-round pick from South Carolina State whose 163 total tackles led the league by 19. The Colts finished 11th in fewest yards allowed and 10th in scoring defense. The future seems even brighter when considering second-year general manager Chris Ballard will have more money to spend, about $118 million in salary-cap space, than any other team this offseason.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Andrew Luck**

**Backups:** Jacoby Brissett, Phillip Walker (UFA), *Brad Kaaya

Luck earned consideration for NFL Comeback Player of the Year (which he won) and NFL MVP honors after career bests in completion percentage (67.3), completions (430) and passer rating (98.7). He tied an NFL record with touchdown passes to 13 different targets. He passed for 4,593 yards and 39 touchdowns with 15 interceptions.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: Marlon Mack**

**Backups:** Nyheim Hines, Jordan Wilkins, Jonathan Williams

Mack overcame injuries to deliver four 100-yard rushing games in his first season as a full-time starter. The last Colts back with four 100-yard rushing games in a season was Joseph Addai in 2007. Mack's 908 yards rushing and 10 total touchdowns assured the Colts have a keeper, if he can stay healthy. He's missed six games in two seasons. Hines was an excellent option out of the backfield with 63 receptions. The equally versatile Wilkins combined hard running with decent pass-catching skills and solid blocking skills. The young trio combined for 1,558 yards rushing, 613 yards receiving and 15 total touchdowns.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starters: *Jack Doyle, Eric Ebron**

**Backups:** Mo Alie-Cox, Ryan Hewitt (UFA), Erik Swoope (UFA), *Ross Travis

Doyle was unable to return to 2017 Pro Bowl form as he was sidelined five games by a hip injury, then suffered a season-ending kidney injury that required surgery. That the Colts were 5-1 when Doyle was in the lineup speaks to his value as a pass catcher and solid blocker. His loss wasn't felt in the passing game because Ebron, a free-agent addition, had a career year that resulted in his first Pro Bowl nod. Ebron led all NFL tight ends with 13 touchdowns, and also ran for a score. Luck counted on his tight ends more than ever before as the position contributed 21 touchdown receptions.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: T.Y. Hilton, Dontrelle Inman (UFA)**

**Backups:** Chester Rogers, Zach Pascal, Ryan Grant (UFA), Daurice Fountain, *Deon Cain, *Marcus Johnson, *James Wright

The oft-hobbled Hilton produced a league-best 951 receiving yards after Week 8, despite practicing just twice in the last month due to a sore ankle. The four-time Pro Bowl star had 76 catches for 1,270 yards and six touchdowns, improved numbers from the year before without Luck. Inman was signed off the street in mid-October and eventually supplanted the ineffective Grant as the No. 2 option with 28 catches for 304 yards and three touchdowns. The Colts won nine of 10 games after Inman was signed. Grant wasn't worth the $5 million he received. Rogers and Pascal made some key plays, but also dropped too many passes.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Anthony Castonzo, LG Quenton Nelson, C Ryan Kelly, RG *Matt Slauson (UFA), RT Braden Smith**

**Backups:** RG Mark Glowinski (UFA), RG/RT Joe Haeg, C Evan Boehm, T Le'Raven Clark, C Josh Andrews, T *J'Marcus Webb (UFA)

When Castonzo finally made his season debut after missing five games with a sore hamstring, pass protection improved dramatically as Luck wasn't sacked for 239 consecutive pass attempts. Nelson was a nasty addition with the sixth overall pick, a humble rookie whose penchant for pancake blocks earned him a Pro Bowl nod. Kelly was playing the best football of his career until slowed by knee and neck injuries. Although Slauson was reliable, his injury loss provided an opportunity for Glowinski, who sometimes graded out better than Nelson. The biggest surprise was Smith adjusting from playing guard in college. He kept the right tackle job even after the veteran Haeg returned from injury.

**Andrew Luck**
Photo by Troy Taormina-USA TODAY Sports

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Jabaal Sheard, DT Denico Autry, NT Margus Hunt (UFA), DE Tyquan Lewis**

**Backups:** DE Kemoko Turay, NT *Al Woods (UFA), NT Grover Stewart, DT Hassan Ridgeway, DE Al-Quadin Muhammad, DT *Jihad Ward, DE *Carroll Phillips

Autry overcame early injuries to become the best pass rusher with nine sacks. The Pro Bowl alternate also had 13 tackles for loss in 12 games. After dominating with six sacks in three games, he drew constant double teams late in the season. Sheard's 14 tackles for loss and 5.5 sacks were OK numbers for a well-paid veteran who will be entering a contract year in 2019.

Hunt is set to become a free agent after making 13 tackles for loss and five sacks in the sixth-year pro's first chance to be a full-time starter, where he started at end and then supplanted Woods at nose tackle. Lewis had his rookie debut delayed by a toe injury, then contributed 13 tackles and two sacks in six starts.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: WLB Darius Leonard, MLB Anthony Walker, SLB Najee Goode (UFA)**

**Backups:** LB Matthew Adams, LB Ahmad Thomas, LB Zaire Franklin, LB *Skai Moore

Leonard earned so much praise, it was easy to overlook Walker's dramatic improvement from starting just two games as a rookie to becoming a full-time starter in 14 games in 2018. Walker's 105 total tackles were second on the team to Leonard's 163. The only veteran presence in this group was Goode, who had 15 tackles in a contract year. Don't expect him back. Adams, Moore and Franklin will compete for that job.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Kenny Moore II, S Malik Hooker, S Clayton Geathers (UFA), CB Pierre Desir (UFA)**

**Backups:** S *Matthias Farley, CB Quincy Wilson, CB Nate Hairston, S Mike Mitchell (UFA), S George Odum, CB Chris Milton, S Corey Moore, S J.J. Wilcox (UFA), S *Ronald Martin

Hooker didn't make as many plays in his second season because he was still recovering from knee surgery that ended his rookie year. Moore led the team with three interceptions. Geathers was third with 89 tackles in a contract year, but dealt with neck, knee and head injuries. Will the Colts re-sign him? Desir started getting more cornerback snaps than Wilson and Hairston, both of whom dealt with nagging injuries. Desir will also be a free agent.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### WIDE RECEIVER

The Colts struggled with drops, especially when Pro Bowl star T.Y. Hilton was sidelined. They must find a solid No. 2 option.

### CORNERBACK

General manager Chris Ballard might bolster this position first. The Colts often struggled in man-to-man coverage and relied on soft zone coverages.

### DEFENSIVE TACKLE

Al Woods lost his nose tackle job to defensive end Margus Hunt and both will be free agents. The Colts must find a run-stuffer on the defensive line.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K Adam Vinatieri, P Rigoberto Sanchez, KOR Zach Pascal, PR Chester Rogers, LS Luke Rhodes

The ageless Vinatieri turned 46 in December, but showed he had plenty of leg with a 53-yard field goal in the regular-season finale. The NFL's oldest player enjoyed a memorable 23rd NFL season with numerous league records, including all-time leading scorer (2,600 points) and most career field goals (582). It was enough to re-sign "Mr. Clutch" to another one-year deal. Sanchez tied for third in net punting average at 42.7 yards and had 59 touchbacks on 88 kickoffs. The Colts didn't allow a touchdown nor score one on returns as the coverage and return units were reliable, but not exceptional.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Quenton Nelson | LG | Notre Dame | Didn't miss a single snap and was named to Pro Bowl. | (16/16) |
| 2 | Darius Leonard | LB | South Carolina State | Set franchise record for total tackles as Pro Bowl alternate. | (15/15) |
| 2 | Braden Smith | RT | Auburn | College guard made smooth transition to new position as a reliable tackle. | (15/13) |
| 2 | Kemoko Turay | DE | Rutgers | Capable pass rusher with four sacks, but sat due to lack of intensity. | (14/3) |
| 2 | Tyquan Lewis | DL | Ohio State | Had two sacks after missing half the season with a toe injury. | (8/6) |
| 4 | Nyheim Hines | RB | North Carolina State | Backup was third on team with 63 receptions and scored four total touchdowns. | (16/4) |
| 5 | Daurice Fountain | WR | Northern Iowa | Spent almost all season on practice squad and didn't force way into lineup. | (1/0) |
| 5 | Jordan Wilkins | RB | Mississippi | Backup had highest yards per carry at 5.6 and was capable pass catcher/blocker. | (16/3) |
| 6 | Deon Cain | WR | Clemson | Opened eyes early in training camp but suffered season-ending knee injury in preseason opener. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Matthew Adams | LB | Houston | Ninth in tackles with 33 and earned more playing time on defense than expected. | (16/5) |
| 7 | Zaire Franklin | LB | Syracuse | Had 29 tackles and made two starts, but was used mostly on special teams. | (16/2) |

Quenton Nelson

**SUMMARY: General manager Chris Ballard had a significantly better draft than his first season. Nelson, Leonard and Smith led a class with nine players who started games.**

# Jacksonville Jaguars

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 302.0 (27th)
**RUSHING:** 107.7 (19th)
**PASSING:** 194.3 (26th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 311.4 (5th)
**RUSHING:** 116.9 (19th)
**PASSING:** 194.6 (2nd)

## 5-Year Breakdown

**B** RATING

Dave Caldwell, who ran the draft for four years after being hired in 2013, and Tom Coughlin, who was put in charge of football operations in 2017 although he retained Caldwell, have had more misses than hits. Caldwell hit a home run in his last draft in 2016 when he drafted Jalen Ramsey, Myles Jack and Yannick Ngakoue with his first three picks. Ramsey and Ngakoue have already made the Pro Bowl, but the only other player he drafted who is still on the team and made the Pro Bowl is linebacker Telvin Smith, who took a step back last year. And the first two drafts under Coughlin haven't been productive.

**Best pick:** CB Jalen Ramsey, R1 2016 — A Pro Bowler the last two years, he is one of the best corners in the league although he seems to court too much controversy.

**Worst pick:** QB Blake Bortles, R1 2014 — The Jaguars finally seemed to give up on him last year when he was benched after a five-year run as a starter because of his bad mechanics and inconsistent play.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 9 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| STARTERS | 4 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

A Jacksonville Jaguars season that started with great expectations and Super Bowl dreams ended in a nightmare of disappointment and dysfunction as the team suffered its ninth losing season in the last 11 years. After a 3-1 start, including a victory over New England that avenged their AFC title game loss last January, the Jaguars lost seven consecutive games and wound up with a 5-11 record.

Along the way, quarterback Blake Bortles was benched with five games left and offensive coordinator Nathaniel Hackett was fired, although Bortles returned to start the final game after backup Cody Kessler was ineffective. The benching raised questions about whether Bortles has a future with the team. Their running game also sputtered as Leonard Fournette started only eight games — including one missed with a suspension — as the team ranked 19th in rushing yardage.

The Jaguars were crippled by a rash of injuries after they had a virtual injury-free season in 2017. Four of their five starting offensive linemen wound up the season on the injured reserve list.

The team also was undisciplined at times, lacked focus and seemed to have a culture problem. And while owner Shad Khan cited stability as a reason for keeping director of football operations Tom Coughlin, general manager Dave Caldwell and head coach Doug Marrone, he gave them a mandate to improve. "I am far from content with the status quo," he said.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Blake Bortles**
**Backups:** Cody Kessler, Tanner Lee

In his five seasons as the starting quarterback, Bortles has been noted for being inconsistent, but he has played just well enough at times to convince the Jaguars he could be their long-term answer — and they gave him a contract extension after he took them to the AFC title game in 2017. But after a 3-1 start last year, Bortles struggled for much of the season. The downturn started with a five-turnover game — including four picks — against the Chiefs and he wound up being benched for four games for the first time in his career.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: Leonard Fournette**
**Backups:** David Williams, T.J. Yeldon (UFA), Carlos Hyde, *Corey Grant (UFA), Tommy Bohanon (UFA), Dimitri Flowers (UFA)

The Jaguars led the league in rushing with 2,262 yards in 2017. Fournette gained 1,040 even though he missed three games, one with a suspension. But he suffered a hamstring injury in the 2018 opener, was injured two more times and missed eight games, including a one-game suspension and gained only 439 yards. The team rushing total dropped to 1,723 yards. They traded for Hyde after Fournette was injured, but he didn't make an impact and Yeldon was benched. The Jaguars have to decide whether to give Fournette one more chance to become the running back they thought he was going to be when they drafted him in the first round two years ago.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: *Austin Seferian-Jenkins**
**Backups:** James O'Shaughnessy (UFA), Blake Bell (UFA), Ben Koyack

After not re-signing veteran Marcedes Lewis, they gambled on signing Seferian-Jenkins even though he has been injury prone and played in more than nine games only once in his first four years. They lost that gamble when he lasted just five games before going on injured reserve. The backups were not productive as O'Shaughnessy led the group with just 214 receiving yards. They have to upgrade this position.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Dede Westbrook, Donte Moncrief**
**Backups:** *Marqise Lee, Rashad Greene (UFA), DJ Chark Jr., Keelan Cole, *Jaydon Mickens (UFA)

The Jaguars didn't re-sign Allen Robinson and Allen Hurns and signed Moncrief for almost $10 million. And then they lost Lee for the season at the end of August. The result was that, including the tight ends, they may have had the worst receiver corps in the league. As a team, they led the NFL in dropped passes with 32 despite being 19th in pass attempts. The receivers averaged 10.4 yards per catch, fourth lowest in the league. Only Westbrook, who led the team with 66 catches for 717 yards, showed much potential for the future.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT *Cam Robinson, LG *Andrew Norwell, C *Brandon Linder, RG A.J. Cann (UFA), RT *Jermey Parnell**
**Backups:** T Ereck Flowers (UFA), T Josh Wells (UFA), T Corey Robinson (UFA), T *Will Richardson, G Patrick Omameh (UFA), G/C Chris Reed, G Brandon Thomas, G *Josh Walker (UFA), C Tyler Shatley (UFA)

The offensive line might have been average at best, but it became one of the worst in the league when it was ravaged by injuries. They started eight different combinations and ended the season with four of the five starters on injured reserve. The result was the Jaguars were the third-most sacked team in the NFL and the

**Jalen Ramsey**
Photo by Matt Stamey-USA TODAY Sports

running backs had little running room against stacked boxes. They need Norwell and Linder, who got the best guard and center contracts in the league when they signed, to stay healthy and be more productive if they are to rebuild the line. Norwell was particularly disappointing after being the Jags' premier free-agent signing.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Yannick Ngakoue, NT Abry Jones, DT Marcell Darius, DE Calais Campbell**

**Backups:** DE Larentee McCray, DE Dawuane Smoot, DE Taven Bryan, DE Lyndon Johnson, NT Eli Ankou, DT Malik Jackson, DT *Michael Hughes

The line, led by Campbell, was a solid unit but they weren't as dominant as 2017 when Campbell had 14.5 sacks and Ngakoue 12.5. Their totals dropped to 10.5 and 9.5 although Ngakoue increased his quarterback pressures from 23 to 33. As a team, they had 18 fewer sacks. Malik Jackson lost his starting job, Dante Fowler was traded and Bryan didn't make much of an impact as a first-round draft pick. They also didn't make enough big plays. In 2017, Ngakone had four forced fumbles and Campbell had three. In 2018, Campbell had one forced fumble, the only defensive lineman to have one.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: WLB Telvin Smith, MLB Myles Jack, SLB *Leon Jacobs**

**Backups:** Blair Brown, Nick DeLuca, Donald Payne

The Jaguars played just two linebackers — Smith and Jack — most of the time. Jack played every snap and Smith missed three games. Smith led the team with a career-high 134 tackles and has now had more than 100 tackles in each of his first five seasons. But he was inconsistent, missing 12 tackles against the run, tied for third most in the NFL, and nine vs. the pass, third most in the NFL. And he allowed 61 receptions, tied for seventh in NFL, for 535 yards. Smith had two picks, including a pick-six that clinched the Miami win. But he got a taunting penalty on the play, a symbol of the lack of discipline and professionalism on the team. Jack was second on the team with 107 tackles.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: LCB Jalen Ramsey, RCB A.J. Bouye, FS Tashaun Gipson, SS *Ronnie Harrison**

**Backups:** CB D.J. Hayden, CB Tre Herndon, CB Tyler Patmon (UFA), CB Quenton Meeks, CB Breon Borders (UFA), FS Cody Davis, SS Jarrod Wilson, SS C.J Reavis

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### QUARTERBACK

After finally benching Blake Bortles last year, the Jaguars need to find a quarterback in the draft or free agency who can open up the offense.

### RUNNING BACK

The Jaguars want to be a power running team, but Leonard Fournette has been injury prone and had off-the-field issues.

### WIDE RECEIVER

To improve their passing game, they not only need to find a new quarterback, but have to find a big-play receiver the new quarterback can target.

The Jaguars were the second-ranked pass defense, but they only had 52 passes defended compared to 81 in 2017 and the defensive backs intercepted just seven passes, three by Jalen Ramsey, their only Pro Bowl player. Barry Church was so inconsistent at safety that he was waived late in the year. He was replaced by Harrison, who played well in two games before ending the season on injured reserve. Still, he is the team's strong safety of the future. Although Ramsey is their best player, he needs to cut down on the trash talking and become more of a leader.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

K *Josh Lambo (UFA), P Logan Cooke, KOR Rashad Greene (UFA), PR Dede Westbrook, LS *Carson Tinker

It says something about the Jaguars that three of their best players were the kicker, punter and punt returner. Lambo made 19 of 21 field-goal attempts before going on injured reserve, Cooke was 11th in net average (45.0) and second in average returns (5.0). And Westbrook averaged 14.0 yards per return and returned one for a touchdown.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Taven Bryan | DE | Florida | They are grooming him for the future, but he didn't show much in his rookie season. | (16/1) |
| 2 | DJ Chark | WR | LSU | Had disappointing season and caught just 14 passes before suffering a quad injury. | (11/0) |
| 3 | Ronnie Harrison | S | Alabama | Most productive draft pick; started eight games before going on injured reserve. | (14/8) |
| 4 | Will Richardson | T | North Carolina State | Didn't appear in a regular-season game and went on injured reserve in mid-season. | (0/0) |
| 6 | Tanner Lee | QB | Nebraska | Spent all but the last game on the practice squad and will vie for a roster spot. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Leon Jacobs | T | Wisconsin | Mainly a special teams player who started three games before going on injured reserve. | (12/3) |
| 7 | Logan Cooke | P | Mississippi State | Won the punting job as a rookie and had an impressive first season. | (16/0) |

D.J Chark

**SUMMARY: Didn't get many starts from the draft class, and the jury out is still out on them heading to their second season.**

# Kansas City Chiefs

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 425.6 (1st)
**RUSHING:** 115.9 (16th)
**PASSING:** 309.7 (3rd)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 405.5 (31st)
**RUSHING:** 132.1 (27th)
**PASSING:** 273.4 (31st)

## 5-Year Breakdown

Landing quarterback Patrick Mahomes makes up for many draft sins, and the Chiefs have plenty of those over the past five seasons. Outside Mahomes, only linebacker Dee Ford, defensive end Chris Jones and center Mitch Morse have emerged as starters among their selections in the first two rounds. Whiffs at cornerback such as KeiVarae Russell and Phillip Gaines also hurt. Marcus Peters and Kareem Hunt turned into Pro Bowlers, but both are gone due to off-the-field issues. Most of the Chiefs' biggest successes came in later rounds where they landed wide receiver Tyreek Hill and guards Laurent Duvernay-Tardif and Zach Fulton. Only Mahomes and seldom-used linebacker Tanoh Kpassagnon remain on the active roster from the team's 2017 draft class.

**Best pick:** QB Patrick Mahomes, R1 2017 — The Chiefs finally found their franchise quarterback. Barring an injury, the Chiefs should be set at this position for a generation.

**Worst pick:** CB KeiVarae Russell, R3 2013 — Russell played in 20 games for Cincinnati over the last three seasons, but he wasn't a fit with the Chiefs and didn't survive through this first training camp.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 6 | 9 | 9 | 6 | 6 |
| STARTERS | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| BACKUPS | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Talk of a Super Bowl run in Kansas City seemed more like a nice idea for the future than a realistic goal in 2018 when training camp began, but the rise of Patrick Mahomes as the next great quarterback supercharged the Chiefs to a 12-4 run, a third-straight AFC West championship and the conference's top overall seed.

The journey didn't come without its share of drama. The Chiefs expected to have defensive leader Eric Berry back at safety after missing most of last season with a torn Achilles. But continuing heel problems limited him to just two regular-season games.

The biggest obstacle, however, emerged with the release of running back Kareem Hunt. The revelation of security video showing Hunt in a physical altercation with a woman at a Cleveland hotel in February conflicted with the version of events Hunt shared with the team. The club cut ties with the Pro Bowl running back, and finished 3-2 down the stretch after a 9-2 start to the season.

But offense drove this team, led by Mahomes earning league Most Valuable Player honors. The Chiefs became the first team in NFL history to score 26 or more points in every game. The offense finished the season with 6.84 yards per play, trailing only the 2000 St. Louis Rams at 6.98 yards per play for the most in the league since 1950.

After a conference championship game loss to New England, defensive coordinator Bob Sutton was fired and replaced by Steve Spagnuolo.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Patrick Mahomes**
**Backup:** Chad Henne

The 2018 season eliminated any lingering doubts if Mahomes would serve as the face of the franchise going forward. His 50 touchdown passes rank tied for second-most in a season and his 5,097 passing yards stand No. 8 all time. The marriage of Mahomes and the Andy Reid offense looks like a match made in heaven. Henne provides a steady veteran presence in the quarterback room and helped Mahomes navigate his first year as a starter.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: Spencer Ware (UFA), FB Anthony Sherman (UFA)**
**Backups:** Damien Williams, Darrel Williams, Charcandrick West (UFA), FB *J.D. Moore

The release of Kareem Hunt ahead of Week 13 changed the Chiefs' offense, but veterans Ware and Damien Williams helped right the ship. Williams, who scored six touchdowns over the final four games of the regular season, signed an extension with the club late in December and expects to compete for a starting role next season. Ware bounced back from a devastating knee injury for 470 yards from scrimmage this season. Sherman earned Pro Bowl honors as a fullback for the first time in his eight-year career.

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Travis Kelce**
**Backups:** Demetrius Harris (UFA), Deon Yelder

Kelce briefly held the single-season record for receiving yards by a tight end with 1,336 before San Francisco's George Kittle bypassed him about a half-hour later, but three-straight 1,000-yard seasons put Kelce in a class all by himself. He set a franchise record for tight ends with 103 receptions, and his 10 touchdowns are a career high. Kelce's durability and production left a smaller role for Harris, who heads into the offseason as a free agent with 12 catches for 164 yards and a career-best three touchdowns.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Tyreek Hill, Sammy Watkins**
**Backups:** Chris Conley (UFA), Demarcus Robinson, *De'Anthony Thomas (UFA), Marcus Kemp, Gehrig Dieter, Kelvin Benjamin (UFA), *Byron Pringle

Hill completed his transformation into an elite No. 1 receiver with a franchise-record 1,479 receiving yards along with 13 total touchdowns. His speed stretches the field like no other receiver in the league, and his deep-ball chemistry with Mahomes continues developing. Watkins shined as a companion to Hill when healthy, but a foot injury again took its toll on the veteran. Conley returned from a season-ending Achilles injury in 2017 and had 32 catches for 334 yards and five scores. Robinson shows flashes of turning into a playmaker, and Kemp reigns as arguably the team's top special teams performer.

### OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Eric Fisher, LG Cam Erving, C Mitch Morse (UFA), RG Laurent Duvernay-Tardif, RT Mitchell Schwartz**
**Backups:** G/C *Jordan Devey (UFA), G/T Andrew Wylie, G Jeff Allen (UFA), G/C Austin Reiter, G Kahlil McKenzie, G/C Jimmy Murray, T *Dillon Gordon, G/C *Tejan Koroma

Injuries again tested the Chiefs' offensive line, with Erving, Morse and Duvernay-Tardif all missing playing time. Wylie and Reiter played well in their absence, and the club signed Erving to an extension with Morse heading toward free agency. Fisher and Schwartz both turned in strong seasons.

**Patrick Mahomes**
Photo by Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

Fisher earned his first Pro Bowl nod and Schwartz earned first-team All-Pro honors. McKenzie didn't play as a rookie as he makes the transition from college defensive lineman to offense in the NFL, but the coaching staff raves about his physical skills and quick learning curve.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Chris Jones, DT Derrick Nnadi, DE Allen Bailey (UFA)**

**Backups:** DT Xavier Williams, DL Justin Hamilton

Jones delivered a breakout season with 15.5 sacks, along with 40 total tackles, including 19 for a loss. The rookie Nnadi showed improvement throughout the season, eventually becoming the starter ahead of Williams. The eight-year veteran Bailey finished with a career-high six sacks. This group still needs more strength and power at the point of attack against the run. Too many backs found holes in the front seven allowing big gains. But Jones provided an inside punch in the pass rush that helped the Chiefs lead the league with 52 sacks.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Dee Ford (UFA), OLB Justin Houston, ILB Anthony Hitchens, ILB Reggie Ragland**

**Backups:** OLB Breeland Speaks, ILB Dorian O'Daniel, ILB *Terrance Smith, ILB Ben Niemann, OLB Tanoh Kpassagnon, OLB Frank Zombo (UFA)

Healthy for the first time in three seasons, Ford fulfilled his promise as an elite pass rusher with 13 sacks. But it might be his 55 overall tackles and league-leading seven forced fumbles that best illustrate his development as an all-around linebacker. The Chiefs will likely use the franchise tag on Ford if they can't reach agreement on terms for an extension. Speaks flashed at times as a potential edge rusher, but the jury remains out if his best position is as a standup linebacker or a down lineman. Hitchens led the Chiefs with 135 combined tackles, but at times struggled in pursuit. Ragland turned in a solid season (86 tackles) after arriving via trade from Buffalo.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Kendall Fuller, CB Steven Nelson (UFA), SS Eric Berry, FS Daniel Sorensen**

**Backups:** S *Armani Watts, CB Charvarius Ward, S Eric Murray, S Jordan Lucas, CB Tremon Smith, S Ron Parker (UFA), CB Orlando Scandrick (UFA), CB *Step Durham

Fuller lived up to his billing as a slot defender, and he slid seamlessly into the secondary in an expanded role as an every-down corner. Nelson showed big-time improvement in his contract season, picking off four passes and tallying a career-best 68 total tackles. Injuries at safety forced the Chiefs into scramble mode starting in training camp, eventually re-signing Parker after his release from the Falcons and landing Lucas in a trade with the Dolphins. With the return of Berry and Sorensen to the lineup late in the season, the Chiefs benched Parker and Scandrick, eventually turning to Ward in a move to get faster and younger at corner.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Harrison Butker, P Dustin Colquitt, KOR Tremon Smith, PR Tyreek Hill, LS James Winchester**

Butker took a small step backward after his huge rookie campaign in 2017, but he still connected on 89 percent of his field-goal tries. The four missed extra points, however, don't concern special teams coordinator Dave Toub. Colquitt turned in another strong season at age 36. In the return game, Hill returned just 20 punts as teams wisely kicked away from him after his 91-yard touchdown return against the Chargers in the season opener. Smith won the kickoff return job as a rookie coming out of camp, averaging 26.8 yards per return.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### CORNERBACK

Kendall Fuller ranks among the top slot corners, but the Chiefs need a shutdown corner on the outside and more depth.

### SAFETY

Eric Berry played just three games over the past two seasons, so the Chiefs need to plan for a future without him. He also needs a running mate on the back end.

### RUNNING BACK

The offense operated at peak efficiency with Kareem Hunt in the backfield. Damien Williams providing depth, but this becomes an unstoppable offense with a high-end feature back.

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | Breeland Speaks | OLB | Mississippi | Displayed improvement as season progressed; needs to make big leap as edge rusher in Year 2. | (16/4) |
| 3 | Derrick Nnadi | DT | Florida State | Shows flashes as force inside, but needs to step up against the run; cut down penalties. | (16/11) |
| 3 | Dorian O'Daniel | ILB | Clemson | Strong coverage skills; can pursue against the run. Could be every-down player down the road. | (16/1) |
| 4 | Armani Watts | S | Texas A&M | Injury kept him from larger role in defense; should compete for starting role in 2019. | (5/0) |
| 6 | Tremon Smith | CB | Central Arkansas | Immediate impact player on special teams. Still adjusting to speed of the game at corner. | (14/1) |
| 6 | Kahlil McKenzie | G | Tennessee | Transitioning from defense to offense, but loads of physical talent and potential. | (0/0) |

Derrick Nnadi

**SUMMARY: The Chiefs went heavy on defense, but no one emerged as a significant contributor as a rookie. More is needed from the class in 2019.**

# Los Angeles Chargers

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 372.6 (11th)
**RUSHING:** 1171.1 (15th)
**PASSING:** 255.6 (10th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 33.7 (9th)
**RUSHING:** 105.8 (9th)
**PASSING:** 227.9 (9th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

**B** RATING

General manager Tom Telesco has done a masterful job of rebuilding this club, with a four-year run of impactful first-round picks in safety Derwin James, wide receiver Mike Williams and defensive ends Joey Bosa and Melvin Gordon. His swing-and-misses have been few, and that includes lower-level picks which has unearthed gems like linebacker Jatavis Brown, defensive tackle Darius Philon, cornerback Desmond King and tackle Sam Tevi.

**Best pick:** RB Melvin Gordon, R1 2015 — Gordon's steady production has not only been beneficial to him but likely helped extend Philip Rivers' career by giving the Chargers a solid running game to take the pressure off Rivers.

**Worst pick:** OL Max Tuerk, R3 2016 — Chargers took a chance on Tuerk, giving him a redshirt year to recover from injuries. But he never did rebound or play a snap in the NFL.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 6 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 7 |
| STARTERS | 0 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 6 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 5 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |

The Chargers settled in Los Angeles one year after the Rams, but they were the first to win a playoff game since the teams attempted to reclaim the city.

Southern California's "other" team in L.A. surged to a 12-4 regular-season record, its best since 2009, and advanced to the playoffs for just the second time in nine seasons in head coach Anthony Lynn's second year.

The Chargers went 7-1 on the road and produced seven Pro Bowl selections. They leaned on Philip Rivers having a solid season (32 touchdown passes, 105.5 rating), the versatility of Melvin Gordon's 1,200 yards from scrimmage that included six rushing touchdowns and four receiving and Michael Williams having a breakout season with 10 scoring receptions.

The 1-2 punch of defensive ends Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram finally got on track after Bosa (foot) missed the first nine weeks. But that duo had plenty of help from All-Pros in rookie safety Derwin James and cornerback Desmond King. James was the first rookie in franchise history to record 100 tackles as he was flexed to various spots in coordinator Gus Bradley's ever-changing alignments.

Just as important was the special teams being shored up by undrafted rookie kicker Michael Badgley. He was solid, and so needed, for a team that had cycled through six unreliable kickers in Lynn's tenure. The return game got a boost with King.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Philip Rivers**
**Backup:** Geno Smith

Rivers has bought into Lynn's idea of better ball security and the mindset of not having to be "Superman" for the Chargers to be successful. Rivers had just 12 interceptions while nearing or matching single-season career marks in several categories; he passed for more than 4,300 yards. Smith saw limited action, which was a plus for the Chargers as the durable Rivers shows no signs of diminishing production at age 37 as his consecutive games streak hit 208 regular-season games, which is tied for third all-time, and the longest active one.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: Melvin Gordon, FB Derek Watt**
**Backups:** Austin Ekeler, Justin Jackson, Troymaine Pope, Detrez Newsome

Gordon put together another Pro Bowl season as he proved to be among the NFL's most versatile backs. He was the third player in franchise history to record 1,200 yards from scrimmage and 10 touchdowns. The hard-nosed Ekeler supplied a different approach and vital depth when Gordon's knee issues arose. Ekeler had a knack for big-chunk running plays and he was also a good receiver. He had three rushing and three pass-catching touchdowns. Watt is asked to block and he does it well, but it translated into just four carries. Jackson, a seventh-round pick, showed a spark in a limited role and appears to be a keeper. He averaged 4.1 yards a carry and had two scores.

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Virgil Green**
**Backups:** Antonio Gates (UFA), Sean Culkin, Hunter Henry, *Austin Roberts

Green came over from the Broncos and was thrust into a more critical role when Hunter (knee) missed the regular season. Green's role was still mainly to block and at times it was uneven. Gates still had his reliable hands and an occasional wiggle to supply yards and usually moving the chains. But Gates was a late replacement for Henry and this unit seldom distinguished itself. Gates, despite possibly playing his final year, paced the tight ends with 28 catches and two scores.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Keenan Allen, Michael Williams**
**Backups:** Travis Benjamin, Tyrell Williams (UFA), Geremy Davis (UFA), Dylan Cantrell, *Artavis Scott

Williams' second season, after a rocky rookie year, was sensational as he had 10 touchdown catches, the most by a Chargers receiver since Tony Martin in 1994. He quickly became a favorite red-zone target of Rivers, especially with Gates in the twilight of his career. Allen had his second straight 1,000-yard season and he added six touchdowns. Tyrell Williams was often the benefactor of defenses gearing coverages elsewhere and he was solid in a supporting role with five scores. Benjamin would add his speed on occasion, mostly coming on jet sweeps or reverses.

### OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Russell Okung, LG Dan Feeney, C Mike Pouncey, RG Michael Schofield, RT Sam Tevi**
**Backups:** C/G Scott Quessenberry, G Forrest Lamp, T Trent Scott, C Cole Toner

Pouncey supplied leadership, but more important a Pro Bowl level of accountability and play. Rivers again was protected well by this front, which is ultra-important considering his lack of mobility. Tevi became a starter as the year wore on to earn his stripes, but it wasn't always clean. Feeney continues to show why he should be a mainstay in the lineup for years to come. On the left edge, the veteran

**Philip Rivers**
Photo by Denny Medley-USA TODAY Sports

Okung was spot-on with his play. It's impressive that this unit was able to block in so many different ways for Ken Whisenhunt's offense.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Joey Bosa, DT *Corey Liuget, DT Brandon Mebane (UFA), DE Melvin Ingram.**

**Backups:** DT Darius Philon (UFA), DE Damion Square (UFA), DE Isaac Rochell, DT Justin Jones, DT T.Y McGill, DE Anthony Lanier

Ingram paced the team with seven sacks and Bosa's abbreviated season produced 5.5. They have established themselves as one of the best pass-rushing duos in the game, with each capable of being game-wreckers. The impact of this tandem can be seen in the performance of the rest of the defense. Everything feeds off these two and it was needed with Mebane missing significant time because of family health issues and Liuget being unavailable for the majority of the season because of a suspension and a knee injury. Philon and Square saw their snaps go up and they both responded well, which should bode well for these two future free agents.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB *Jatavis Brown, ILB *Denzel Perryman (UFA), ILB Kyle Emanuel (UFA), OLB Kyzir White**

**Backups:** OLB Uchenna Nwosu, OLB Hayes Pullard, OLB Kyle Wilson, ILB Nick Dzubnar

Key players went down to injuries and that made stopping the run an issue. But the depth here came through as well as some tinkering with schemes by coordinator Gus Bradley. The secondary, too, pitched in with run support to help this depleted unit. Perryman is a thumper, but his body gave out again. Brown stepped in and played very well, then he went down. White was blossoming before he was injured but he's a good find. As rookies, White and Nwosu showed some big-time potential and had some key tackles down the stretch.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Casey Hayward, FS Derwin James, SS Jahleel Addae, CB Michael Davis**

**Backups:** CB Desmond King, S Adrian Phillips (UFA), S Rayshawn Jenkins, CB Brandon Facyson, CB Jeff Richards, CB *Jason Verrett (UFA), CB *Trevor Williams, CB *Jaylen Watkins (UFA)

James burst upon the scene and never hit the brakes, delivering an All-Pro season as a rookie. He was plugged in throughout the defense and came up with 105 tackles, 3.5 sacks and three interceptions. James proved he'll be a cornerstone for this defense for the foreseeable future. Hayward was solid again and King worked the slot with a resume that included his second pick-six in two years. Addae's year had ups and downs, with him supplying big hits but he didn't always play the game smartly. With a looming cap hit of $6 million, it will be interesting to see how his future develops. Phillips, a stud on special teams, was solid in a backup role and the same goes for Jenkins.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Michael Badgley, P Donnie Jones (UFA), KOR/PR Desmond King, LS Michael Windt**

Badgley took over the duties after Caleb Sturgis stumbled and the Chargers finally found their kicker. He missed on but one of his 16 field-goal attempts and that one was blocked. His efforts included a franchise-record 59-yarder as the team's Achilles' heel, its kicking game, suddenly became a strength. King is a weapon and he proved it with a 73-yard touchdown off a punt return in an epic comeback over the Steelers. Jones was OK, more steady than spectacular, and as a pending free agent the Chargers might be looking elsewhere.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on injured reserve.*

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### LINEBACKER

There is talent on the roster at this spot, but it seems difficult for it to stay healthy. Another inside linebacker is needed with possible free-agent defcctions.

### DEFENSIVE TACKLE

Brandon Mebane's availability was restricted last year. He's a free agent and an upgrade to the interior line could be made.

### QUARTERBACK

The Chargers are set with Philip Rivers playing at a high level. But with Geno Smith and little else behind him, the Chargers have to plan for the day when Rivers retires.

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Derwin James | FS | Florida State | Was a starter and impact player beginning with the season opener in producing an All-Pro season. | (16/16) |
| 2 | Uchenna Nwosu | OLB | USC | Got some valuable playing time when injuries hit and he played well. | (16/3) |
| 3 | Justin Jones | DT | NC State | Got to learn, then play later; will benefit him going forward. | (15/0) |
| 4 | Kyzir White | ILB | West Virginia | Was hitting his stride before a knee injury derailed his season. | (3/3) |
| 5 | Scott Quessenberry | C/G | UCLA | Spent rookie year absorbing lessons from Mike Pouncey and contributing on special teams. | (15/0) |
| 6 | Dylan Cantrell | WR | Texas Tech | Talent depth at wide receiver didn't work in his favor but he's in the plans. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Justin Jackson | RB | Northwestern | Jackson earned his stripes when forced into action because of injuries, showing promise and production. | (13/1) |

Derwin James

**SUMMARY: The Chargers hit a home run with James and he'll be a focal point of their defense over a run that should produce multiple Pro Bowl seasons.**

# Los Angeles Rams

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 421.1 (2nd)
**RUSHING:** 139.4 (3rd)
**PASSING:** 281.7 (5th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 358.6 (19th)
**RUSHING:** 122.3 (23rd)
**PASSING:** 236.3 (14th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

A RATING

The Rams drafted the reigning offensive and defensive players of the year in Todd Gurley II and Aaron Donald, both of whom got MVP consideration this year and will in years to come. They also found their franchise quarterback in Jared Goff, a highly productive wide receiver in Cooper Kupp and a starting caliber receiver in Josh Reynolds. In addition, they secured their long-term right tackle for the present and future in Rob Havenstein, a potential Pro Bowl safety in John Johnson and a tight end in Gerald Everett whose best football is in front of him. That's not too shabby.

**Best pick:** DT Aaron Donald, R1 2014 — You could go with Gurley and maybe Goff, depending on how it all plays out. But for now, Donald is the best pick as a transcendental defensive tackle and a potential future Hall of Famer.

**Worst pick:** LT Greg Robinson, R1 2014 — Hard to blame the Rams here as he was a consensus top-three pick by most analysts. Problem is, it just never worked out for him.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 11 | 9 | 6 | 8 | 11 |
| STARTERS | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 10 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 6 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0 |

The Los Angeles Rams continue to take steps in the right direction under the leadership of general manager Les Snead and second-year head coach Sean McVay. They have one of the best young rosters in the NFL and have core players Todd Gurley II, Aaron Donald, Brandin Cooks and Rob Havenstein under contract and with room to accommodate young quarterback Jared Goff. Meanwhile, their 24 regular-season wins over the last two seasons tied for the most in the NFL with the Patriots, their offense has scored the most points in the league and they own the highest point differential.

All signs are pointing up with a young coach, a young quarterback, a destination location players are attracted to and a general manager that seems to be in lock step with the coaching staff.

The key now is continuing to build up from that, and that means going into the offseason with a big eye on bringing in an impact pass rusher, most likely off the edge, depth along the defensive line, reinforcements at both linebacker positions, cornerback depth, a potential new starter at safety and a young, developmental offensive lineman.

Despite the Super Bowl LIII loss, the Rams' window is wide open, but to maximize it they must continue to address areas of need. There aren't widespread needs, but there are specific areas they can improve.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Jared Goff**
**Backup:** Sean Mannion (UFA)

The Rams are set at the top of their depth chart with Goff, who earned another Pro Bowl berth in his third season after guiding the Rams to their second straight division title and piloting one of the best offenses in the NFL. But they could be looking for a backup considering Mannion is in the last year of his contract and, given his lack of playing time the last four years, they might want more experience behind Goff.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: Todd Gurley II**
**Backups:** C.J. Anderson (UFA), *Malcolm Brown, John Kelly, Justin Davis

Gurley was one of the most productive backs in the league, although he missed the last two games with a knee injury. But he signed a long-term contract extension during training camp so he is here for the long haul. Anderson came aboard late in the season after Brown went down and, as a starter in place of Gurley, produced back-to-back 100-yard performances. The Rams might kick the tires on bringing him back as a reserve. Kelly impressed in some late-season carries and will be a factor in training camp for a more prominent role.

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Tyler Higbee**
**Backups:** Gerald Everett, Johnny Mundt

The Rams could look to upgrade this position in the offseason as they simply haven't gotten the consistent big-time production they had hoped for, although Everett is a player on the come and figures to blossom in the years ahead. Higbee has likely reached his ceiling and is a player the Rams could look to replace with a younger, more explosive prospect.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Robert Woods, Brandin Cooks, *Cooper Kupp**
**Backups:** *Michael Thomas, KhaDarel Hodge, JoJo Natson, Josh Reynolds

Assuming Kupp returns healthy from the season-ending knee injury he suffered, the Rams are completely set at receiver with the trio of Cooks, Woods and Kupp all capable of exceeding 1,000 yards receiving. And Reynolds, who stepped in for Kupp, is better than his "backup" status reflects. One through four it's hard to imagine a more potent group. Thomas and Hodge will also fight for bigger roles next year.

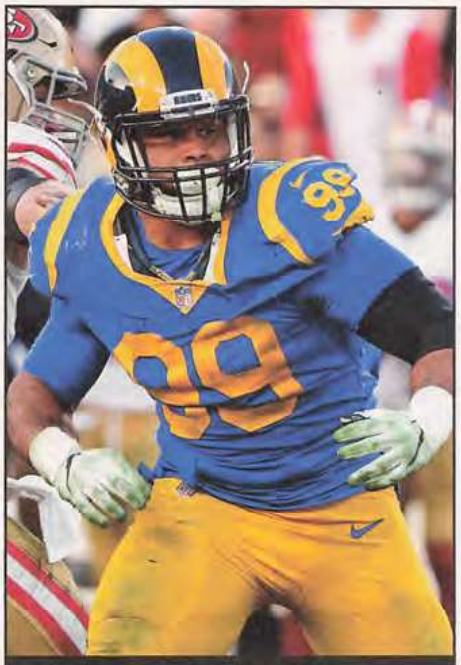
### OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Andrew Whitworth, LG Rodger Saffold (UFA), C John Sullivan (UFA), RG Austin Blythe, RT Rob Havenstein**
**Backups:** C/G Brian Allen, T/G Joe Noteboom, G/T Jamil Demby

While the line didn't grade out as well last year as it did in 2017, and depth will undoubtedly be sought through younger players, there is reason to feel good about this group. The Rams want Saffold back, but money will play a role. Noteboom showed enough as a rookie to believe he could play as a starter at guard next year. Whitworth showed little signs of diminished play, even at 37, and should be back to anchor the line. Blythe and Havenstein appear locks on the right side, especially after Havenstein signed a long-term extension. However, the Rams could look to upgrade at center, where Sullivan's play took a bit of a step back and youngsters like Allen or, if the Rams shuffle the deck a little bit Blythe, could provide a sufficient replacement.

### DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DT Aaron Donald, NT Ndamukong Suh (UFA), DT Michael Brockers**
**Backups:** DE Johnathan Franklin-Myers, DT Ethan Westbrooks (UFA), DE Justin



**Aaron Donald**
Photo by Robert Hanashiro-USA TODAY Sports

Lawler, DT Sebastian Joseph-Day, DT Tanzel Smart.

While Donald is the best defensive player in the NFL and an absolute force in pass rush and run defense, the Rams probably need to consider some changes alongside him. Suh did not live up to expectations after the Rams signed him to a $14 million contract last offseason. He wasn't bad, but he wasn't the dominant force the Rams had hoped he'd be. Brockers, either because of scheme or just play, wasn't as good in 2018 as he'd been in 2016 and 2017. Brockers figures to stay, but with Suh a free agent there is a good chance he was a one-and-done player in Los Angeles. Westbrooks is a free agent but considering the cost, could be a candidate to return. Franklin-Myers flashed pass-rush skill as a rookie and will be a part of the plan moving forward as a situational player. Joseph-Day essentially took a developmental role last year as a rookie, but the Rams like him and believe there is a role for him in the future.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Samson Ebukam, OLB Dante Fowler Jr. (UFA), ILB Cory Littleton, ILB Mark Barron**

**Backups:** OLB Matt Longacre (UFA), OLB *Morgan Fox (UFA), OLB *Dominique Easley (UFA), OLB Trevon Young, OLB Ogbonnia Okoronkwo, ILB Micah Kiser, ILB Ramik Wilson (UFA), ILB Bryce Hager

The Rams will look deeply into the draft and free agency in search of upgrading a position that was a disappointment in many ways. There was always going to be a learning curve for Ebukam, a first-year starter in his second year, and while there is potential and plenty of upside, he needs to produce more going into next year. Fowler was brought in at the trade deadline to bring pressure off the edge and while he delivered a dynamic the Rams had been missing, the question now is: did he do enough to warrant a return and will someone step up with an offer the Rams can't or won't match? Okoronkwo is an intriguing prospect but a major unknown after breaking his foot in OTAs and not seeing the field after returning from injured reserve eight weeks into the season. Young, similarly, is a player the Rams want to get a better look at. No matter what, though, the Rams will look for reinforcements this offseason. Inside, Littleton had a solid year as a first-year starter and will be counted on next season. Barron is a candidate to be a salary-cap casualty, but there is not a viable replacement among the younger players behind him.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Aqib Talib, CB Marcus Peters, SS John Johnson, FS Lamarcus Joyner (UFA)**

**Backups:** CB Nickell Robey-Coleman, CB Sam Shields (UFA), CB Troy Hill (UFA), S Blake Countess, DB Darius Williams, S Marqui Christian, CB *Kevin Peterson, CB *Dominique Hatfield

The Rams were mostly pleased with their cornerbacks once Talib returned to the lineup after missing eight games. Paired with Peters, it's an effective duo. Robey-Coleman was once again a valuable slot corner. But there is uncertainty behind them as Shields and Hill are free agents. The Rams will certainly look to the draft for replacements. Additionally, Joyner is a question mark as he becomes a free agent at the start of the league year in March.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Greg Zuerlein, P Johnny Hekker, LS Jake McQuade**

The Rams are set with one of the best special teams units in the game. Not much more needs to be said.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### OUTSIDE LINEBACKER

The Rams need more explosiveness off the edge, especially if Dante Fowler Jr. leaves as a free agent.

### DEFENSIVE LINE

Ndamukong Suh is an unrestricted free agent and his return is uncertain. The Rams would love to get a young lineman in the draft who can step in as a Day-1 starter.

### SAFETY

Lamarcus Joyner is a free agent, and depending on his market, the Rams might not be able to retain him. A strong safety is a definite area of need.

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | Joseph Noteboom | T | TCU | The Rams like Noteboom moving forward and when called upon he was solid last year in spot duty. | (16/0) |
| 4 | Brian Allen | C | Michigan State | Likely the center of the future; Allen played well in a reserve role when called upon. | (13/0) |
| 4 | John Franklin-Myers | DE | Stephen F. Austin | Flashed natural pass-rush ability; played his way into a situational role all year. | (16/0) |
| 5 | Micah Kiser | LB | Virginia | The Rams like the young linebacker and as a rookie, he was a special teams ace. | (16/0) |
| 5 | Ogbonnia Okoronkwo | LB | Oklahoma | Suffered a broken foot in OTAs. Activated in Week 9 but wasn't active in any games. | (0/0) |
| 6 | John Kelly | RB | Tennessee | Kelly has a bright future, and while he was on the roster all year he played in just four games. | (4/0) |
| 6 | Jamil Demby | T | Maine | The Rams brought Demby back after losing him to the Lions as a training camp cut. They like his potential. | (0/0) |
| 6 | Sebastian Joseph | DT | Rutgers | Essentially spent his year on the roster as a developmental player. The Rams believe he has a future. | (0/0) |
| 6 | Trevon Young | LB | Louisville | Split time between the active roster and practice roster. | (2/0) |
| 7 | Travin Howard | LB | TCU | Spent the year on the practice roster. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Justin Lawler | DE | Southern Methodist | Was active all season and got onto the field as a situational pass rusher. | (16/0) |

**SUMMARY: The Rams didn't have a first- or second-round draft pick but they still did a great job acquiring depth and some potential starters down the road.**

John Franklin-Myers

# Miami Dolphins

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 289.9 (31st)

**RUSHING:** 108.6 (18th)

**PASSING:** 181.3 (30th)

**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 391.1 (29th)

**RUSHING:** 145.3 (31st)

**PASSING:** 245.8 (21st)

## 5-Year Breakdown

**B**
RATING

If 2017 first-round defensive end Charles Harris can somehow blossom this year, then the past three drafts would look pretty good.

Going back further, the 2014 draft produced a second-round star in Jarvis Landry, but the Dolphins traded him to the Cleveland Browns. Right tackle Ja'Wuan James, a starter who is a free agent this spring, could bolt, too, leaving Miami with virtually nothing to show for the 2014 draft.

The 2015 draft was problematic with two busts in the first two rounds (receiver DeVante Parker and defensive tackle Jordan Phillips).

The 2016 draft looks outstanding with left tackle Laremy Tunsil and corner Xavien Howard plus speedy playmakers Kenyan Drake and Jakeem Grant.

The 2017 draft features starters at middle linebacker (Raekwon McMillan) and defensive tackle Davon Godchaux.

**Best pick:** CB Xavien Howard, R2 2016 — Getting a Pro Bowler in the second round was a steal for Miami. Howard has 11 interceptions in his past 17 games, including two against Tom Brady and two against Andrew Luck.

**Worst pick:** WR DeVante Parker, R1 2015 — His underwhelming Dolphins career appears to be over.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 8 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 8 |
| STARTERS | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| BACKUPS | 1 | 0 | 3 | 5 | 5 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

A 3-0 start had Miami Dolphins head coach Adam Gase surely feeling vindicated. He finally had his quarterback, Ryan Tannehill, healthy and performing well after missing all of 2017 due to a knee injury.

But then Miami's season crumbled, starting with the very next game, an embarrassing 38-7 loss at the New England Patriots.

In the next game, Miami led 17-0 late in the third quarter before falling apart. The Cincinnati Bengals scored 27 consecutive points for a 27-17 win as Tannehill threw a pick-six and also gave up a touchdown on a fumble.

Tannehill missed the next five games due to a sore throwing shoulder, and Miami went 2-3 with Brock Osweiler at quarterback, and that included an overtime win over the playoff-bound Chicago Bears.

When Tannehill returned, the Dolphins went 2-1 in his first three games, including a stunning home win against the Patriots.

However, the Dolphins stumbled down the stretch, losing their final three games, including humiliating defeats against a pair of teams with losing records, the Jacksonville Jaguars and the Buffalo Bills.

In the end, the Dolphins finished 7-9, losing to five teams with losing records, and that got Gase fired.

Gase, who was Denver's offensive coordinator when the Broncos broke the Patriots' single-season scoring record in 2013, went 23-25 in three seasons with the Dolphins. Former New England linebackers coach Brian Flores was hired to replace Gase as the team's new head coach.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Ryan Tannehill**

**Backups:** Brock Osweiler (UFA), David Fales (UFA), *Luke Falk

Tannehill, selected by Miami with the eighth overall pick in the 2012 draft, may have come to the end of the road with the Dolphins. Now at age 30, Tannehill has missed 25 games since December of 2016 due to injuries, and he would cost Miami $26.6 million against the salary cap were he to return in 2019. It's quite possible Miami will not bring back any of its 2018 quarterbacks.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: *Frank Gore (UFA)**

**Backups:** Kenyan Drake, Kalen Ballage, Brandon Bolden (UFA), Senorise Perry

Miami ranked 18th in the NFL with 108.6 rushing yards per game, but the Dolphins tied for seventh in average per rush (4.7).

Gore, a Miami native, returned home for the first time in his illustrious NFL career and led the Dolphins with 722 yards while averaging 4.6. But Gore, a five-time Pro Bowl player who is fourth in NFL history in rushing yards, will be 36 next season, and the Dolphins may opt to go younger.

Drake and Ballage are the youthful alternatives. Drake was second on the Dolphins with 535 yards (4.5 average) and also added 53 catches for 477 yards. In all, he had 1,012 yards and a team-best nine touchdowns.

Ballage is Miami's biggest back (6-3, 230 pounds), but he showed speed (191 yards, 5.3 average) in flashes.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Danny Amendola, Kenny Stills**

**Backups:** *Albert Wilson, *Jakeem Grant, DeVante Parker, Leonte Carroo, Isaiah Ford, Brice Butler

The Dolphins can — and likely will — save $9.4 million against the cap by releasing Parker, who was Miami's first-round pick in 2015 but has been a disappointment.

At Louisville, Parker was known for high-pointing footballs, using his 6-3, 210-pound frame. This season, he had career lows in catches (24), yards (309) and touchdowns (1).

Unlike Parker, Stills has been durable, missing just one game the past three years. However, Stills was less a part of Miami's attack in 2018, going from 105 targets and 58 catches to 64 targets and 37 grabs. His yardage also decreased, from 847 to 553.

Amendola, who had spent the previous five seasons with the New England Patriots, was a solid addition, leading the team with 59 receptions. He caught 75 percent of the passes thrown his way, which led the Dolphins (minimum 15 catches). The 33-year-old fits as a veteran possession receiver.

What made this unit special — albeit briefly last year — was the play of Wilson and Grant before they got injured. In 10 games, Grant scored twice on receptions, once on a punt return and once on a kickoff return.

Wilson, who played just seven games, caught four touchdown passes and even threw a 52-yard scoring pass on a trick play.

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Mike Gesicki**

**Backups:** Nick O'Leary, *A.J. Derby (UFA), Durham Smythe, *Marqueis Gray (UFA)

Gesicki, a big-time playmaker at Penn State and Miami's second-round pick, didn't live up to lofty rookie expectations. Highly athletic, Gesicki was supposed to be a huge weapon in the red zone, but he caught just 22 passes, averaged 9.2 yards and did not score. He played all 16 games, starting seven.

Smythe, a rookie fourth-round pick out of

**Kiko Alonso**
Photo by Kirby Lee-USA TODAY Sports

Notre Dame, is more of a blocking tight end. He played 15 games, started two and caught six passes. O'Leary, the 26-year-old grandson of golfing legend Jack Nicklaus, was cut by the Buffalo Bills on Sept. 1 and was activated by Miami on Oct. 5. In 12 games, including seven starts, O'Leary showed some flashes, particularly in a win over the Chicago Bears, catching four passes for 49 yards and one touchdown.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Laremy Tunsil, LG *Josh Sitton, C *Daniel Kilgore, RG Jesse Davis, RT Ja'Wuan James (UFA)**

**Backups:** LG Ted Larsen, T Sam Young (UFA), C Travis Swanson (UFA), C Wesley Johnson (UFA), C *Jake Brendel, G Isaac Asiata, T Zach Sterup

The Dolphins gave up 52 sacks – only four teams allowed more last season. Injuries hit hard as four-time Pro Bowler Sitton played just one game before suffering a rotator-cuff injury. Kilgore made it four games before he was lost due to an arm injury.

Tunsil, Miami's first-round pick in 2016, is one of Miami's bright lights. He and James are rated as "above average" blockers by Pro Football Focus. Davis, Brendel and Swanson are ranked as average, and Larsen and Johnson below average.

Going forward, the Dolphins need major work on the offensive line, especially at guard and center.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Robert Quinn, DT Davon Godchaux, DT Akeem Spence, DE Cameron Wake (UFA)**

**Backups:** DE Charles Harris, DT *Vincent Taylor, DE Andre Branch, DE *William Hayes (UFA); DT Evander Hood (UFA), DT Sylvester Williams (UFA), DE Jonathan Woodard (RFA), DT Kendrick Norton

Quinn had just one sack in his first nine games but led the team with 6.5 after a strong finish. The Dolphins can save $12.5 million on the cap by cutting Quinn. Wake, who made $9 million and produced six sacks at age 36, could be gone after an honorable Dolphins career. Hayes ($4 million salary) played just three games due to injury. The Dolphins could save $7 million if they cut Branch, who was 15th on the team in tackles.

The problem for Miami is that no young pass-rusher has emerged, and Harris, the team's first-round pick in 2017, has just three sacks in two years.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Kiko Alonso, MLB Raekwon McMillan, OLB Jerome Baker**

**Backups:** OLB Stephone Anthony (UFA), MLB Mike Hull, MLB *Chase Allen

The starting trio could return as Alonso was among the leading tacklers in the NFL, and Baker and McMillan were solid as first-year players. Alonso, criticized in the past for too few impact plays, was better in 2018. He grabbed three interceptions and forced three fumbles. He also was penalized too often for late hits. Baker, meanwhile, was especially impressive as a speedy rookie.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### QUARTERBACK

With a substantial cap hit, it is likely time for the Dolphins to move on from Ryan Tannehill, and there are no young quarterbacks on the roster with starter potential.

### OFFENSIVE LINE

Other than left tackle Laremy Tunsil, the Dolphins need help everywhere else on the line.

### DEFENSIVE END

With Miami likely to move on from starters Robert Quinn and Cameron Wake plus backups Andre Branch and William Hayes, there's a major need here.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Xavien Howard, CB Bobby McCain, FS Reshad Jones, SS T.J. McDonald**

**Backups:** CB Torry McTyer, CB Cornell Armstrong, CB Jalen Davis, CB Tony Lippett (UFA), S Minkah Fitzpatrick, S Walt Aikens, S Maurice Smith, CB Cordrea Tankersley

Howard made the Pro Bowl and tied for the NFL lead with seven interceptions. The Dolphins lack a true No. 2 corner as McCain is better suited for nickel coverage. Fitzpatrick, Miami's first-round pick, was solid, and the Dolphins will likely elevate him to full-time starter in 2019. Either Jones ($5 million cap hit) or McDonald ($2.5 million) could be cut to save on the cap.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Jason Sanders, P Matt Haack, LS John Denney (UFA)**

Rookie Jason Sanders made 90 percent of his field goals (18-of-20). Haack was 25th in the NFL with a 44.6 punting average.

**Asterisk indicates player finished season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Minkah Fitzpatrick | S | Alabama | He's a future star, proving it with 80 tackles, nine passes defended and two interceptions. | (16/11) |
| 2 | Mike Gesicki | TE | Penn State | With just 22 catches, Gesicki didn't live up to expectations, but the potential is there. | (16/7) |
| 3 | Jerome Baker | LB | Ohio State | He impressed with his 4.5 speed, posting 79 tackles and three sacks | (16/11) |
| 4 | Durham Smythe | TE | Notre Dame | Drafted primarily as a blocker, and he should get better as he matures physically | (15/2) |
| 4 | Kalen Ballage | RB | Arizona State | A big back with speed, and he showed potential (5.3 average) in limited carries | (12/0) |
| 6 | Cornell Armstrong | CB | Southern Miss | After a year as a backup, there's a chance he develops. Plays hard and will hit. | (15/0) |
| 7 | Quentin Poling | LB | Ohio | He spent the year on the practice squad but has potential as a run-stuffer and special-teamer | (0/0) |
| 7 | Jason Sanders | K | New Mexico | He was outstanding — 10-for-10 on field goals inside 40 yards and 18-for-20 overall. | (16/0) |

**SUMMARY: Exhibit A why personnel man Chris Grier kept his job and was promoted to general manager. The Dolphins got value with every pick.**

Minkah Fitzpatrick

# Minnesota Vikings

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 345.8 (20th)
**RUSHING:** 93.3 (30th)
**PASSING:** 252.5 (13th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 309.7 (4th)
**RUSHING:** 113.4 (15th)
**PASSING:** 196.3 (3rd)

## 5-Year Breakdown

The Vikings have built their team on success in the draft, only augmenting positions with free agents such as Cousins, Richardson, Reiff and Linval Joseph. Minnesota has generally hit on its early picks, an important fact, but also has found a few diamonds in the rough such as Jerick McKinnon (third round, 2015), Diggs (fifth, 2015), Hunter (third, 2015), Weatherly (seventh, 2016), Morgan (sixth, 2016), Gedeon (fourth, 2017) and Jaleel Johnson (fourth, 2017). The two biggest misses (Carlson and Treadwell) are major mistakes. Sixteen of the team's 22 offensive and defensive starters are draft picks or undrafted rookies signed by the team.

**Best pick:** WR Stefon Diggs, R5 2015 — With respect to Hunter, getting Diggs in the fifth was a major coup. He had talent coming out of Maryland, but he's a hard worker, and is now one of the league's top receivers.

**Worst pick:** WR Laquon Treadwell, R1 2016 — Cutting a fifth-round kicker after two games is bad, getting almost nothing from a first-round receiver is worse. Treadwell has 56 catches – and plenty of drops – in his three seasons despite plenty of opportunities.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 10 | 10 | 8 | 11 | 8 |
| STARTERS | 1 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 5 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 4 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 5 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 0 |

There is no doubting the 2018 season was a disappointment for the Minnesota Vikings. Coming one game away from the Super Bowl the previous season and then adding the top quarterback in free agency can only be seen one way. Not only did Minnesota not reach a Super Bowl, it didn't make the playoffs with quarterback Kirk Cousins.

The Vikings (8-7-1) had every reason to have high hopes. They signed Cousins to a three-year, $84 million contract. They added to the league's leading defense from the prior year, signing defensive tackle Sheldon Richardson.

The defense slipped early in the season, leading to plenty of shootouts with Cousins. But head coach Mike Zimmer turned around his defensive unit and it was back to being among the league's best by the end of the season. The offense with Cousins and new offensive coordinator John DeFilippo could never find an identity.

Cousins was throwing for many yards, but Zimmer often said he wanted to run the ball more. Zimmer fired DeFilippo just 13 games into his time with Minnesota. Kevin Stefanski took over and got the running game going. However, the Vikings season ended with just 164 offensive yards in the loss to Chicago in the regular-season finale.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Kirk Cousins**
**Backups:** Trevor Siemian (UFA), Kyle Sloter

Cousins was general manager Rick Spielman's solution to the constant quarterback shuffling, the franchise signal-caller that was going to get Minnesota to the Super Bowl. Cousins still has two more seasons on the franchise-altering contract he signed, but his first season was a letdown. The Vikings hope Cousins is the long-sought franchise quarterback, one the team has been seeking, arguably, since Daunte Culpepper shredded his knee in 2005. Cousins still put up big numbers (4,298 passing yards, 30 touchdowns) but had turnover issues and couldn't sustain the offense at times. Siemian was the veteran backup, but he was never needed. Sloter is the young player Minnesota is trying to develop.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: Dalvin Cook, FB C.J. Ham**
**Backups:** Latavius Murray (UFA), Ameer Abdullah (UFA), Mike Boone, Roc Thomas, FB *Johnny Stanton

The presence of Cook provides one good reason for Zimmer wanting to run more. Coming back from knee surgery — and missing five games with a hamstring injury — Cook took a while to get going but was at his best late in the season. In his second season after being a second-round pick, Cook ran for 615 yards to lead the team and displayed his versatility with 40 receptions for 305 yards. Murray helped pick up the slack a year earlier when Cook sustained the knee injury. He was a competent backup but he didn't provide much, either, except for success in the red zone with six rushing touchdowns. Abdullah was signed midseason from Detroit and played sparingly. Ham was an effective fullback when on the field.

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Kyle Rudolph**
**Backups:** David Morgan, Tyler Conklin, *Josiah Price

Rudolph continued to be a steady performer, but he wasn't utilized as much in the passing game with Cousins focused more on receivers Adam Thielen and Stefon Diggs. Particularly, Rudolph wasn't the end zone threat he's shown the ability to be. He had 64 catches for 634 yards. But he had just four touchdowns, the fewest of any 16-game season in his career. Morgan is relied on as a blocker and he was missed when an injury knocked him out for five games. Conklin, a fifth-round pick, had five catches as a rookie.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Stefon Diggs, Adam Thielen**
**Backups:** Aldrick Robinson (UFA), Laquon Treadwell, Chad Beebe, Brandon Zylstra

Perhaps no team has two starters as good as Diggs and Thielen. Thielen was on a record-setting pace early in the season before his production slipped along with the passing offense. He still finished tied for fourth in the league with 113 receptions and was ninth with 1,373 receiving yards. Diggs was 11th in the NFL with 102 receptions. It's hard to fault the production and talent Diggs and Thielen bring and they're both under contract through at least 2020. Robinson was signed after a few games and eventually overtook Treadwell, who is looking like a 2016 first-round bust.

### OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Riley Reiff, *Nick Easton (UFA), C Pat Elflein, RG Mike Remmers, RT Brian O'Neill**
**Backups:** G Tom Compton (UFA), C Brett Jones (UFA), G Danny Isidora, T Rashod Hill, *Aviante Collins, *Cedrick Lang

The weak link for Minnesota the past several seasons was, again, a big reason why the offense was inconsistent. The issues started in training camp when Elflein was slow to come back from offseason surgeries and Easton sustained a season-ending neck injury. Compton

**Adam Thielen**
Photo by Brad Rempel-USA TODAY Sports

was signed to be a versatile backup but was miscast as an every-down starter in Easton's place. Elflein missed the first two games and Reiff missed three games. Reiff's injury did thrust O'Neill into the lineup and he improved throughout the season, eventually overtaking Hill as the starter. Remmers' move to guard hasn't led to solidifying that spot.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Danielle Hunter, NT Linval Joseph, DT Sheldon Richardson (UFA), DE Everson Griffen**

**Backups:** DE Stephen Weatherly, DT Tom Johnson (UFA), DT Jaleel Johnson, DE Tashawn Bower, DT/DE Jalyn Holmes, * DE Ade Aruna

Hunter has become one of the top pass rushers in the league, but he's also good against the run. Griffen has been one of the NFL's top pass rushers for the past several seasons. He missed five games to deal with his mental health. Joseph is a rock in the middle and Richardson brought a pass rush from the inside, a perfect complement to Joseph, Hunter and Griffen. Weatherly showed promise when he had to start for Griffen and became part of the increasing rotation along the line. Tom Johnson was re-signed after he was let go by Seattle and was steady.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Anthony Barr (UFA), MLB Eric Kendricks, OLB Ben Gedeon**

**Backups:** OLB Eric Wilson, MLB Kentrell Brothers, LB Devante Downs, *OLB Hercules Mata'afa

Barr and Kendricks play the most as Minnesota goes to its nickel defense the majority of the time. Gedeon starts in the base. Wilson is a former undrafted player who came on this season after previously being a strong special teams player. Wilson started in place of Kendricks late in the year when Kendricks was injured. Wilson emerged during the season. A four-time Pro Bowl player, Barr will have other options now, but he's valuable to Zimmer and the defense.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Xavier Rhodes, CB Trae Waynes, S Harrison Smith, *S Andrew Sendejo**

**Backups:** CB *Mike Hughes, CB Mackensie Alexander, CB Holton Hill, S Anthony Harris (UFA), S Jayron Kearse, CB Marcus Sherels (UFA), S George Iloka (UFA), CB Craig James

Rhodes and Waynes are a top starting combination and Minnesota is deep at corner with Hughes, Alexander and Hill. Rhodes dealt with lingering injuries and never seemed to play at the level from the past two seasons. Waynes has developed into a solid player on the other side. Hughes showed signs before his rookie season was cut short after six games. Alexander developed as a strong nickel in his third season, finally grasping the position after some maturity issues. Hill was an undrafted rookie who the Vikings put time in developing and he showed promise. The biggest question is who plays besides Smith, one of the league's best safeties. Sendejo has been the starter but a groin injury limited him to five games.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Dan Bailey (UFA), P Matt Wile, LS Kevin McDermott, *KR Mike Hughes, PR Marcus Sherels (UFA), KR Ameer Abdullah (UFA)**

Rookie kicker Daniel Carlson, a fifth-round draft choice, was cut after just two games. Bailey, the second-most accurate kicker in NFL history when he was signed by the Vikings, had an inconsistent season. Wile was claimed off waivers before the season started. He has a big leg. Sherels has long been a steady, reliable punt returner. Hughes got first crack at kickoff returner in his rookie season and returned four kicks for a 26.8-yard average.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### OFFENSIVE LINE

There's no other way to put it, Minnesota must finally dedicate significant resources to improving the offensive line. All three of the top needs could be right here.

### KICKER

The position that has vexed the Vikings for years needs consistency. This position has hurt the Vikings for too long.

### SAFETY

Harrison Smith needs a partner. Andrew Sendejo has seemingly been a stopgap for years. Anthony Harris played well down the stretch but is a free agent.

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Mike Hughes | CB/KR | Central Florida | Proved to be a quick learner and showed promise before a knee injury ended his season. | (6/2) |
| 2 | Brian O'Neill | T | Pittsburgh | Project who became a starter. Injuries gave him a shot and he didn't let it go. | (15/11) |
| 4 | Jalyn Holmes | DT | Ohio State | Another project pick; moved inside and didn't get much playing time. | (5/0) |
| 5 | Tyler Conklin | TE | Central Michigan | Billed as an athletic pass catcher, he got more time when David Morgan was hurt. | (16/3) |
| 5 | Daniel Carlson | K | Auburn | Was cut after missing three field-goal attempts in Week 2. | (2/0) |
| 6 | Colby Gossett | G | Appalachian State | On practice squad before being signed by Arizona and started four games. | (0/0) |
| 6 | Ade Aruna | DE | Tulane | Missed the season while on injured reserve with a knee injury. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Devante Downs | LB | California | Contributed on special teams coverage units as a rookie and saw a few defensive snaps. | (11/0) |

Brian O'Neill

**SUMMARY: For a team with Super Bowl aspirations, the draft didn't offer much immediate help. O'Neill perhaps developed quicker than expected, but the rest offered little.**

# New England Patriots

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 393.4 (5th)

**RUSHING:** 127.3 (5th)

**PASSING:** 266.1 (8th)

**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 359.1 (21st)

**RUSHING:** 112.7 (11th)

**PASSING:** 246.4 (22nd)

## 5-Year Breakdown

The drafts over the past five years have been disappointing. The Patriots have struggled in the early rounds to find consistent reliable starters. The Patriots did not have a first-round pick in 2016 and 2017. The first pick in the 2016 draft was cornerback Cyrus Jones, who is no longer on the roster, and in 2017 it was defensive lineman Derek Rivers, who only has appeared in six games in two seasons. The Patriots though, have found reliable starters in later rounds like offensive linemen Joe Thuney and Shaq Mason.

**Best pick:** DE Trey Flowers, R4 2015 — Flowers is a good defensive end who can rush the passer from the inside and has improved a lot against the run. Flowers, a free agent, should receive a large contract in the offseason. The question is whether it will come from the Patriots.

**Worst pick:** DT Dominque Easley, R1 2014 — Simply put, the worst first-round pick of the Bill Belichick era – even worse than Laurence Maroney. Easley lasted only two seasons with the team.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 8 | 11 | 9 | 4 | 9 |
| STARTERS | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 4 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

The New England Patriots finished 11-5 — their worst regular-season record since 2009. Still, the team won the AFC East, earned a first-round bye and won the Super Bowl for the second time in three seasons. It was not the best regular season of the Tom Brady-Bill Belichick era. The offense lacked enough receivers to reach its capability with Brady. Josh Gordon had 40 catches until the NFL suspended him. Tight end Rob Gronkowski, who could be playing his last season, had only 47 catches and struggled to get open against single coverage at times. Super Bowl MVP Julian Edelman remained an elite receiver who could make tough catches and gain yards after the catch. Sony Michel gave the Pats strong production at running back, and James White excelled catching the ball out of the backfield.

Defensively, the Pats had a strong secondary by the end of the season with corners Stephon Gilmore and J.C. Jackson. The safety play was respectable with Devin McCourty, Patrick Chung and Duron Harmon. The run defense struggled at times and more pass rush up front is needed. Trey Flowers likely had his best year and was a strong force in both the running and passing game. The Patriots will face a difficult decision about how much to pay him in the offseason.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Tom Brady**

**Backup:** Brian Hoyer

Brady's decision-making at times could have been better and sometimes his accuracy was mediocre. Brady, though, is still a top-five quarterback who can make great throws. His leadership skills and ability to read defenses is still top-notch. Brady wants to play until he's 45. That might be a stretch, but he has at least a couple of years left in him. Hoyer is under contract in 2019 and will likely remain the backup given his close relationship with Brady.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: Sony Michel, James White**

**Backups:** Rex Burkhead, FB James Develin, *Jeremy Hill (UFA)

Everyone expected the Patriots to be deep at running back heading into training camp. Bad luck occurred quickly. Michel missed most of training camp with a knee injury. Hill tore his ACL in the first game and missed the rest of the season. Burkhead hurt his neck early in the year and missed most of the season before returning at the end of the year. Michel finished with 931 yards rushing and was a tough runner who could elude tacklers. White, an excellent pass-catching running back, slowed down in the second half of the year. Develin is a reliable fullback.

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Rob Gronkowski**

**Backups:** Dwayne Allen, Jacob Hollister, *Ryan Izzo

This position might be overhauled in the offseason. Gronkowski often couldn't get open against single coverage because of his injuries. His blocking ability remained effective in the run game. Allen and Hollister offered little production. Allen is unlikely to return and Hollister will likely get a chance to compete for a roster spot in training camp.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Julian Edelman, Chris Hogan (UFA), Cordarrelle Patterson (UFA)**

**Backups:** Phillip Dorsett (UFA), Matthew Slater, *Braxton Berrios, *Riley McCarron, *Cody Hollister, *Darren Andrews

This position was a merry-go-round from the beginning of training camp. The Patriots tried numerous receivers in training camp and nothing seemed to work out. The team traded for Gordon early in the season. He played in 11 games and had 40 catches before the NFL suspended him again. Edelman, the only receiver under contract for 2019 aside from Berrios (who never played in 2018), had 74 catches after missing the first four games because of suspension. Hogan and Dorsett had their moments, but neither showed enough consistency. Patterson is a fast gadget player, but not a route-running receiver.

### OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Trent Brown (UFA), LG Joe Thuney, C David Andrews, RG Shaq Mason, RT Marcus Cannon**

**Backups:** C/G Ted Karras, T LaAdrian Waddle (UFA), G James Ferentz, T *Isaiah Wynn, C/G *Brian Schwenke (UFA), G *Ulrick John (UFA)

The Patriots received a tough break when they lost first-round pick Wynn for the year in training camp. The biggest surprise was the ease with which Brown moved from right to left tackle. Brown had only played right tackle prior to being acquired from San Francisco. The interior of the line played well. Thuney did not miss a snap all season. Andrews and Mason are solid inside. Cannon struggled at times against the run and swing tackle Waddle was reliable.

### DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Trey Flowers (UFA), DL Malcom Brown (UFA), DL Lawrence Guy, DE Deatrich Wise**

**Backups:** DL Adam Butler, DE Derek

**Tom Brady**
Photo by Greg M. Cooper-USA TODAY Sports

Rivers, DL Danny Shelton (UFA), DE John Simon (UFA), DL Ufomba Kamalu (UFA), DE Adrian Clayborn, DE Keionta Davis

Flowers, the best of the group, needs to convert more pressures into sacks. Flowers had 7.5 sacks, tied for 34th in the league. The rest of the group needs improvement. Simon was a nice addition and passed Clayborn on the depth chart by the end of the season. Clayborn was a big disappointment, as he often rushed past the quarterback. Butler is a reliable third-down rusher. Guy had his moments and Wise keeps on working to get better. Brown, the team's 2015 first-round pick, has been a disappointment. Shelton was inconsistent. Davis and Rivers hardly played.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: LB Dont'a Hightower, LB Kyle Van Noy, LB Elandon Roberts**

**Backups:** Albert McClellan (UFA), Ramon Humber (UFA), Brandon King, *Ja'Whaun Bentley,
*Christian Sam

The Patriots are thin at this position and became desperate after Bentley was placed on injured reserve when the Patriots lost to the Lions in Week 3. Bentley impressed teammates and coaches in training camp with his ability to learn the defense and his instincts. Hightower lacks the speed he once did and needs to make more plays. The Patriots face a difficult decision regarding whether he should return. Van Noy is a smart instinctive linebacker who is limited by his athleticism. Roberts improved with his ability to correctly find the right lanes in pursuit. He also hits hard so he could be a punishing force in the run game in the future.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Stephon Gilmore, CB Jason McCourty (UFA), S Devin McCourty, S Patrick Chung**

**Backups:** CB Jonathan Jones (UFA), S Duron Harmon, CB J.C. Jackson, CB Keion Crossen, CB Duke Dawson, S Obi Melifonwu, S Nate Ebner, CB *Eric Rowe (UFA)

This unit is the strength of the defense. Gilmore is a shutdown corner who is one of the best in the NFL. Jackson, an undrafted rookie, looks like a steal. He is physical and unafraid to be feisty with elite wide receivers. He shut down Steelers wide receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster. Jason McCourty, when given help is an effective corner, but struggles in space. The safeties need to make more plays. Chung covers tight ends and tackles well. Devin McCourty has good instincts, but is not the elite player of several years ago. Harmon is effective against the deep ball, but sometimes takes poor tackling angles. Recall Tyreek Hill's game-tying catch against the Patriots in the fourth quarter of the Kansas City game or Brandon Bolden's long touchdown run in Miami.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Stephen Gostkowski (UFA), P Ryan Allen (UFA), KOR Cordarrelle Patterson (UFA), PR Julian Edelman, LS Joe Cardona**

Allen is an elite punter. He often pins opponent deep in their own territory. Gostkowski still has a strong leg on kickoffs and only missed four field-goal attempts and one extra point this year. Patterson had one kickoff return for a touchdown and Edelman is a feisty punt returner who doesn't outthink himself when there is a hole. Hightower blocked a punt in Chicago.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### DEFENSIVE LINE

This need will increase if the Patriots lose Trey Flowers in free agency. More pass rush is needed along with another strong run stuffer.

### LINEBACKER

The Patriots must decide whether to keep Dont'a Hightower given the decline in speed. The team could select their future middle linebacker in the 2019 draft.

### WIDE RECEIVER

The Patriots have only one wide receiver (who played this year) under contract for next year. They must find some receivers in the draft or free agency.

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Isaiah Wynn | T | Georgia | Wynn did not play. He was placed on injured reserve in training camp. | (0/0) |
| 1 | Sony Michel | RB | Georgia | After being labeled a bust early in the year, Michel had a good year with 931 yards rushing. | (13/8) |
| 2 | Duke Dawson | CB | Florida | Dawson never played a snap even after being activated from injured reserve late in the year. | (0/0) |
| 5 | Ja'Whaun Bentley | LB | Purdue | Bentley showed promise, but only played three games before he was placed on injured reserve. | (3/2) |
| 6 | Christian Sam | LB | Arizona State | Sam never played a snap. He spent the year on injured reserve. | (0/0) |
| 6 | Braxton Berrios | WR | Miami | Berrios never played a snap. He spent the season on injured reserve. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Danny Etling | QB | LSU | Etling spent the year on the practice squad and never played a snap. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Keion Crossen | CB | Western Carolina | Crossen mainly contributed on special teams. He seldom played at cornerback. | (11/0) |
| 7 | Ryan Izzo | TE | Florida State | Izzo never played a snap and spent the year on injured reserve. | (0/0) |

**SUMMARY: Injuries devastated the Patriots' 2018 draft class. Michel played well as did undrafted rookie J.C. Jackson.**

**Sony Michel**

# New Orleans Saints

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 379.2 (8th)
**RUSHING:** 126.6 (6th)
**PASSING:** 252.6 (12th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 349.1 (14th)
**RUSHING:** 80.2 (2nd)
**PASSING:** 268.9 (29th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

C RATING

It has been feast or famine for the Saints during this period, but the 2016 and 2017 classes have produced enough significant players to mitigate a host of bad picks. The 2017 class featured the Defensive Rookie of the Year (cornerback Marshon Lattimore) and the Offensive Rookie of the Year (running back Alvin Kamara), two other young standouts in tackle Ryan Ramczyk and safety Marcus Williams and another starter in linebacker Alex Anzalone. The recent emergence of three 2016 class members — defensive tackles Sheldon Rankins and David Onyemata, and safety Vonn Bell — to go along with outstanding receiver Michael Thomas has turned that class into a very good one. The 2014 and 2015 classes were poor.

**Best pick:** RB Alvin Kamara, R3 2017 — He's one of the most dynamic offensive players in the NFL and given the fact that he was taken in the third round, the value is outstanding.

**Worst pick:** CB Stanley Jean-Baptiste, R2 2014 — He played in just four games as a rookie and was cut at the end of his second training camp.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 6 | 9 | 5 | 7 | 7 |
| STARTERS | 0 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 0 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

The New Orleans Saints built off the momentum established during the 2017 season. After three consecutive 7-9 finishes, they won the NFC South and a wild-card playoff game in 2017. They followed that up with two more wins to finish at 13-3, repeat as division champions and claim the No. 1 seed in the NFC.

While the offense continued to hum behind Drew Brees, Alvin Kamara, Mark Ingram II and Michael Thomas — as well as one of the top lines in the league — it was a vastly improved defense — led by free-agent acquisition Demario Davis at linebacker and the emergence of tackle Sheldon Rankins as a complement to Pro Bowl end Cameron Jordan — and very good special teams that elevated New Orleans to even greater heights in 2018.

The season got off to a shaky start with a surprising loss to Tampa Bay and a narrow escape against Cleveland, which was the beginning of a 10-game winning streak that featured linear improvement. A mid-season victory against the previously undefeated Rams and a blowout win against the defending Super Bowl champion Eagles established New Orleans as one of the NFL's elite teams, a designation that remained through a slight drop-off in offensive efficiency down the stretch.

The Saints showed that they could still win in a Brees-led shootout, but could also ride the defense and specials teams when necessary.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Drew Brees**
**Backups:** Teddy Bridgewater (UFA), Taysom Hill

Brees was as good as ever at age 39. The Saints were less dependent on him as he had his first season with fewer than 4,000 passing yards. But his efficiency was even better than normal as he broke his own NFL record for completion percentage (74.4) and had his best touchdown-interception ratio (32-5). Bridgewater would be a potential successor to Brees, but he likely will opt for a better immediate opportunity in free agency. Hill is a useful jack-of-all-trades, but not an every-down quarterback.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: Mark Ingram II (UFA), Alvin Kamara**
**Backups:** FB Zack Line, Dwayne Washington, *Daniel Lasco (UFA)

Ingram and Kamara were arguably the best tandem in the NFL for the second consecutive season even though Ingram missed the first four games while suspended. The possible loss of Ingram in free agency and the lack of quality depth behind the top two means New Orleans will likely address the position in free agency or the draft. Line is a useful blocker and Washington showed potential as a backup when he rushed for 100-plus yards while Kamara sat out the regular-season finale.

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Benjamin Watson (UFA)**
**Backups:** Josh Hill, Dan Arnold, *Michael Hoomanawanui (UFA)

This position was mostly unproductive and could look quite different in 2019. Watson is retiring, Hoomanawanui missed the season because of injury, Hill wasn't much of a factor and Arnold is still learning the position after switching from wide receiver in training camp. Head coach Sean Payton likes to use two-tight end sets and have the versatility of blockers and catchers, but it will take significant offseason work to supply all that at a high level.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Michael Thomas, Ted Ginn Jr.**
**Backups:** Tre'Quan Smith, *Cameron Meredith, Austin Carr, Keith Kirkwood, Tommylee Lewis (UFA), Simmie Cobbs Jr., *Dez Bryant (UFA), *Travin Dural

Thomas was one of the most productive receivers in the NFL, but there was little productivity behind him. Ginn was the No. 2 threat, but he missed 11 games because of a knee scope and he'll turn 34 in the offseason. Smith showed promise in the preseason, but did little when it counted. The Saints started looking for veterans to upgrade the depth in training camp and it continued into the season with no success. Bryant was the most prominent candidate, but he suffered a season-ending Achilles injury and might not be re-signed. Meredith was hampered by a surgically repaired knee that led Chicago to let him go in free agency. Carr, Kirkwood and Lewis have yet to prove they can be counted on consistently.

### OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Terron Armstead, LG Andrus Peat, C Max Unger, RG Larry Warford, RT Ryan Ramczyk**
**Backups:** G/T Jermon Bushrod (UFA), G *Josh LeRibeus (UFA), T *Michael Ola, C Will Clapp, C Cameron Tom (UFA), T Derek Newton

When healthy, this unit has been one of the keys to the team's success. Armstead and Peat have been in and out of the lineup because of injury for multiple seasons. Unger was healthy the entire season and Warford was mostly healthy, providing stability on the interior. Ramczyk was one of the top tackles in the NFL in just his second season. Bushrod was a useful backup at tackle and guard before he was

**Michael Thomas**
Photo by Derick E. Hingle-USA TODAY Sports

sidelined by injury, but he's 34 years old. Clapp performed well and showed an ability to handle multiple positions.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Alex Okafor, DT Tyeler Davison (UFA), DT *Sheldon Rankins, DE Cameron Jordan**

**Backups:** DE Marcus Davenport, DT David Onyemata, DT Taylor Stallworth, DE Trey Hendrickson, DT *Jay Bromley (UFA)

The Saints traded this year's No. 1 draft choice to Green Bay to move up in the first round of last year's draft and select Davenport as a complement to Jordan at end. Though Davenport demonstrated the talent that attracted the Saints — 4.5 sacks despite being limited by injury — it was Rankins, a No. 1 pick two years earlier, who emerged as the most significant complement to Jordan, who had another outstanding season. Rankins will spend the offseason rehabbing an Achilles injury suffered in the playoffs. Davison was much improved, Okafor bounced back from an Achilles injury in 2017 and Onyemata and Stallworth provided useful depth as the line set the tone for a much-improved defense.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: MLB Demario Davis, OLB Alex Anzalone, OLB, A.J. Klein**

**Backups:** OLB Craig Robertson (UFA), MLB Manti Te'o (UFA), OLB Vince Biegel (UFA)

The signing of Davis as a free agent and the return to health of Klein and Anzalone turned this into the most improved unit on the team. Davis had a Pro Bowl-caliber season in 2018. He led the team in tackles and produced five sacks. Klein was a steady tackler on the outside (69) and Anzalone's speed made him effective in pass coverage and defending the run. Robertson remained a valuable player, but more on special teams than defense, and Te'o, a starter in 2017, was inactive for most of the second half of 2018 as the starters excelled and the Saints utilized backup defensive backs more than backup linebackers.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Marshon Lattimore, CB Eli Apple, SS Vonn Bell, FS Marcus Williams**

**Backups:** CB *Patrick Robinson, CB P.J. Williams (UFA), S Kurt Coleman, CB Ken Crawley (UFA), S Chris Banjo (UFA), CB Justin Hardee (UFA), CB Josh Robinson, S Rickey Jefferson (UFA)

This unit started slowly and had a couple of rough outings late in the season, providing the only real chink in the defense's armor. But most of the time the group played well after the acquisition of Apple in a trade with the Giants on Oct. 23. Lattimore didn't duplicate the success he had as the NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year in 2017, but he was solid.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### TIGHT END

Benjamin Watson is retiring and there's no guarantee any of the other tight ends on the roster will be capable of replacing him.

### WIDE RECEIVER

There's little quality depth behind Michael Thomas, which is a problem on a team that likes to use lots of wide receivers.

### RUNNING BACK

The potential loss of Mark Ingram II in free agency would make this a significant need. Even if he returns the depth needs strengthening.

P.J. Williams had a rough start at corner, but played better as the nickel back after Robinson was injured and Apple was acquired. Marcus Williams was solid for the second consecutive season and Bell emerged as one of the most-improved players on the team in his third season. Coleman had less of an impact as a free-agent acquisition than was anticipated and Crawley's playing time shrunk significantly after Apple arrived.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Wil Lutz (UFA), P Thomas Morstead, KOR Taysom Hill, PR Tommylee Lewis, LS Zach Wood (UFA)**

Lutz and Morstead were outstanding, the coverage units were fine, but the return game was lacking. Lutz broke Morten Andersen's franchise record for consecutive field goals made and Morstead was excellent as he has been routinely during a brilliant 10-year career. Hill was adequate as a kickoff returner, and there was a revolving door at punt returner, which was a wide-open competition from July through December.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Marcus Davenport | DE | Texas-San Antonio | Slowed by injury, but still showed the ability to develop into an outstanding player. | (13/0) |
| 3 | Tre'Quan Smith | WR | Central Florida | Was a preseason star, but other than a couple of nice games was mostly a non-factor. | (15/7) |
| 4 | Rick Leonard | T | Florida State | He was cut during training camp and was on Arizona 's practice roster. | (0/0) |
| 5 | Natrell Jamerson | S | Wisconsin | He was cut during training camp and wound up on Green Bay's roster. | (0/0) |
| 6 | Kamrin Moore | CB | Boston College | Was cut during training camp and is now out of the NFL. | (0/0) |
| 6 | Boston Scott | RB | Louisiana Tech | Was cut and signed to the practice squad before Philadelphia signed him to its active roster. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Will Clapp | C | LSU | Has proven to be a smart and versatile player who could have a bright future. | (3/1) |

Marcus Davenport

**SUMMARY: It was going to be hard to match last year's success, but unless Davenport, Smith and Clapp become stars this class will be a disappointment.**

# New York Giants

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 356.1 (17th)

**RUSHING:** 103.1 (24th)

**PASSING:** 252.9 (11th)

**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 371.4 (24th)

**RUSHING:** 118.6 (20th)

**PASSING:** 252.8 (23rd)

## 5-Year Breakdown

B RATING

After seeing draft pick after draft pick fail to make it into their second contract, let alone finish out their rookie deals, Jerry Reese was relieved of his duties and replaced by Dave Gettleman. With that change came a change in how the team has approached its draft process.

Whereas Reese tended to build from the outside in, Gettleman believes in starting in the trenches with his beloved "hog mollies" on both sides of the ball. The hope is to arm the coaching staff with the talent to win the battles in the trenches, a place where the Giants have been beaten down far too often since their last Super Bowl championship in 2011.

**Best pick:** RB Saquon Barkley, R1 2018 — The rookie finally gives opposing defensive coordinators a reason to worry about the Giants running game. Barkley set or shattered numerous records on his way to becoming the new face of the franchise.

**Worst pick:** LT Ereck Flowers, R1 2015 — Flowers proved to be uncoachable both at left tackle and right tackle. He was benched after two lackluster performances and eventually sent packing.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 7 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| STARTERS | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 5 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

The New York Giants' 5-11 record might not show it, but the franchise is headed in the right direction, according to general manager Dave Gettleman.

Gettleman, who turned over more than 60 percent of the roster that finished 3-13 the year prior, noted that while the record wasn't anything to smile about, the never-say-die spirit was a marked contrast from the prior year.

"To go 1-7 for the first half of the year and to lose a number of close games and to have the types of practices we were having where there was focus, there was energy, things were getting accomplished and the proof was in the pudding by what we did in the last eight games, that's why I think the foundation is right," he said in his year-end press conference.

Of course, having a solid foundation doesn't necessarily translate to wins, but Gettleman was honest in saying there was still a lot of work to be done with the roster, especially on the defensive side of the ball.

"It's not easy to win games when you don't have playmakers," Gettleman said. "We need to improve the defense, guys. Just like I looked you right in the eye last year and told you we've got to fix this O-line, we've got to get better on the defensive side."

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Eli Manning**

**Backups:** Alex Tanney, Kyle Lauletta

Manning established career highs in completion percentage (66 percent) while just missing matching his career low (10) in interceptions by one. Despite showing he can still get the job done, his future is far from settled, as he enters the final year of his contract in 2019. Lauletta had a disappointing rookie season that included an arrest for a traffic-related incident and a disastrous 0-5 showing in a blowout win over Washington that led to his demotion back to third string.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: Saquon Barkley**

**Backups:** Wayne Gallman, FB Eli Penny, *Jonathan Stewart (UFA), *Paul Perkins

Barkley shattered numerous franchise and league records while all the while learning to become a more patient runner between the tackles. He still has room to grow in his blitz pickups, but so far, he's fully proven he was worthy of the No. 2 overall pick in the draft. Gallman didn't get many opportunities with Barkley being healthy all 16 games, but for the most part, the second-year player made the most of what he did get. Stewart was a disappointment on the field but was a key figure in rebuilding the locker-room culture. Penny might just turn out to be a nice steal as the team's fullback. He got better and better as the season moved on and should be back for an encore in 2018.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starters: Evan Engram, Rhett Ellison**

**Backups:** Scott Simonson (UFA), Garrett Dickerson

Engram and Ellison dealt with some injuries, but by year's end, Engram had taken the bigger leap forward. Engram improved his ball security, seeing his drops decline from 11 in 2017 to three this year while also improving his NFL rating from 82.4 to 115.6, with a good chunk of his success coming in the last four games of the year. Ellison slipped in his blocking performance this year, though how much of that was due to lower body injuries is up for debate. Simonson came on strong down the stretch as an in-line blocker and should get a chance to compete for a spot next year.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Odell Beckham Jr., Sterling Shepard**

**Backups:** Cody Latimer (UFA), Russell Shepard (UFA), Corey Coleman, *Quadree Henderson, Bennie Fowler (UFA), *Jawill Davis, Alonzo Russell

After inking the richest contract in league history for a receiver, Beckham failed to finish his second season in a row due to injury, but a bigger concern with him seemed to be a steady decline in his NFL rating, a figure that has gone down every year since his rookie season. Shepard saw his role expand to where he was taking nearly as many snaps outside as he was inside, but he struggled against press coverage. Where he did step up though was as a blocker. The Giants never really established a third receiver, going with a committee with very little success. Moving forward, they might want to get themselves a big target who can be a threat in the red zone.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Nate Solder, LG Will Hernandez, C Spencer Pulley, RG Jamon Brown (UFA), RT Chad Wheeler**

**Backups:** C/G *Jon Halapio, C/G John Greco (UFA), T Brian Mihalik, G/T *Nick Gates

It took four attempts, but eventually the Giants got the right offensive line combination. Still, the right side of the line needs work. Brown, who came in with a bang at right guard, finished with a whimper. Wheeler was overwhelmed at right tackle and almost certainly will be replaced next year. On the left side, Solder got better as the year went on as did Hernandez, the rookie selected in the second

**Odell Beckham Jr.**
Photo by Matthew Emmons-USA TODAY Sports

round. The Giants might also be looking for a new center if Halapio, their original choice to be the starting center, doesn't make it back from a broken ankle suffered in Week 2.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE B.J. Hill, NT Dalvin Tomlinson, DE Kerry Wynn (UFA)**

**Backups:** DE Josh Mauro (UFA), DL R.J. McIntosh, DT John Jenkins (UFA), DL Mario Edwards Jr. (UFA)

Once the Giants traded Damon Harrison, they were able to move Hill and Tomlinson to their natural positions on the line, where both played well. Wynn had his best season since his rookie year, but the Giants are likely to move on from him given the depth of defense in this class. McIntosh was lost most of the year by an undisclosed illness, but he started to show signs of being a part of the rotation when he returned. Mauro faded after a strong start.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: WLB Olivier Vernon, ILB Alec Ogletree, ILB B.J. Goodson, SLB Kareem Martin**

**Backups:** OLB Lorenzo Carter, ILB Nate Stupar (UFA), LB Ukeme Eligwe, OLB Connor Barwin, LB Tae Davis, *LB Jordan Williams

Barwin never really amounted to much in his limited snaps, but it's Vernon, who currently has the third highest cap figure on the team in 2019, who was the bigger disappointment. He again missed games due to a high ankle sprain, but even when he returned, he didn't have much of an impact. Ogletree started slowly, but finished up strong, leading the team in interceptions. Carter, one of the team's third-round picks, showed potential as an edge rusher, but needs some upper body work to better hold up against the run.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: RCB Janoris Jenkins, *SS Landon Collins (UFA), FS Curtis Riley, LCB B.W. Webb (UFA), Slot CB Grant Haley**

**Backups:** S Michael Thomas, S/CB Sean Chandler, S Kamrin Moore, DB Tony Lippett, CB *Antonio Hamilton, S Kenny Ladler, CB *Sam Beal

The Giants asked Collins to do everything except sell concessions, and he did so to the best of his ability. Until they put someone better than Riley next to him, Collins is probably going to continue struggling to regain his Pro Bowl form from 2016. At corner, look for Beal, who spent the season on injured reserve, to have the inside track on the starting job. The team might end up retaining Jenkins for one more season rather than creating a new hole on the defense. Another keeper has to be Hamilton, who developed into a core special teams ace.

## SPECIALISTS

**K Aldrick Rosas, P Riley Dixon, LS Zak DeOssie (UFA), KOR Corey Coleman, PR Cody Latimer (UFA)**

Rosas literally went from being the worst kicker in the NFL last year to the best, converting 97 percent of his field goals for the second-best mark behind Robbie Gould of the 49ers (97.1) among kickers who kicked for one team the entire season. Dixon's 41.8 net average put him seventh in the league. Despite getting some flashes from Coleman as a return specialist, Quadree Henderson, who finished the year on injured reserve, brings a little more sure-handedness to the table.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### EDGE RUSHER

With Olivier Vernon looking as if he'll be a salary cap casualty and the draft class being rich in edge rushers, expect the Giants to dip into the youth pool.

### SAFETY

The Giants need to keep and pair Landon Collins with a free safety who can play better angles and miss fewer tackles than Curtis Riley.

### RIGHT TACKLE

The offensive line improved in the second half of 2018, but it could still use a big, powerful right tackle who can move defenders.

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Saquon Barkley | RB | Penn State | Showed some flashes but was also plagued by penalties in trial-by-fire season. | (16/16) |
| 2 | Will Hernandez | LG | Texas-El Paso | Rapid-developing offensive lineman brought a mean streak to the unit. | (16/16) |
| 3 | Lorenzo Carter | LB | Georgia | Showed flashes of being a pro-level pass rusher but needs more work vs. run. | (15/2) |
| 3 | B.J. Hill | DT | North Carolina State | Solid 3-tech player who came on strong in second half of the season. | (16/12) |
| 3 | Sam Beal | CB | Western Michigan | Chosen in the third round of the supplemental draft, Beal landed on injured reserve during camp. | (0/0) |
| 4 | Kyle Lauletta | QB | Richmond | Proved he wasn't quite ready to make the leap from a small program to the NFL. | (1/0) |
| 5 | R.J. McIntosh | DT | Miami | Lost most of the season due to an undisclosed medical condition. | (6/0) |

Saquon Barkley

**SUMMARY: Gettleman's first draft class with the team produced four solid starters. The jury is still out on Lauletta, but overall, this class was a home run.**

# New York Jets

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 299.2 (29th)
**RUSHING:** 101.4 (26th)
**PASSING:** 197.8 (25th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 380.4 (25th)
**RUSHING:** 126.3 (26th)
**PASSING:** 254.1 (24th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

C
RATING

The Jets have experienced more misses than hits in four years of Mike Maccagnan drafts and the final year of the John Idzik regime. Among their best picks include safety Jamal Adams, who is a key piece to build around. Defensive end Leonard Williams has shown potential but not consistency. But the last five drafts are also defined by who is not on the Jets and those figures are high.

**Best pick:** S Jamal Adams, R1 2017 — Adams is a stud who was the leading tackler last season. The Jets need more players like him or "dawgs" as Adams said following the season finale. He could be an All-Pro for several years and someone the Jets should secure on a long-term basis.

**Worst pick:** QB Christian Hackenberg, R2 2016 — Hackenberg was a complete bust and flamed out of the league for now. He was not close to being good enough to get into a game even in a blowout and was traded to Oakland where he was sent packing after just three weeks.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 12 | 6 | 7 | 9 | 6 |
| STARTERS | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| BACKUPS | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 10 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 |

It is eight years and counting for the Jets as far as their playoff drought is concerned. It will soon be 50 years and counting for the Jets since their only appearance in the Super Bowl.

Three straight seasons with double-digit losses have Jets fans wondering when the team will produce a winning season again. The Jets are armed with significant salary-cap space to potentially obtain in the words of Jamal Adams some "dawgs" to enhance a team that lost nine of their last 10 games.

At least the Jets can say they have a legitimate quarterback based on what Sam Darnold showed in the final few weeks. Although he endured a rough showing in the season-ending 38-3 loss at New England, Darnold was solid in the previous three weeks, leading the Jets down the field in the fourth quarter while showing poise and mobility in the pocket.

Now the question is whether general manager Mike Maccagnan can justify the faith CEO Chris Johnson bestowed upon him and use the cap space to surround Darnold with more talent and improve an undisciplined and inconsistent defense.

The Jets possess several clear needs which were exposed during a four-win season and one is at running back. While Trenton Cannon and Elijah McGuire showed some promising signs, someone such as Le'Veon Bell would be a clear upgrade.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Sam Darnold**
**Backups:** Josh McCown (UFA), Davis Webb

If the last few games are any indication, the Jets appear to have found their quarterback. Darnold began his rookie season with a blowout win in Detroit, struggled midway through, injured his right foot and returned with some memorable plays. Darnold completed 57.7 percent of passes for 2,865 yards and threw 17 touchdown passes. The Jets haven't felt this confident in their quarterback situation in years since Chad Pennington, and Darnold provided plenty of reasons to justify the optimism.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: *Isaiah Crowell, *Bilal Powell (UFA)**
**Backups:** Elijah McGuire, Trenton Cannon, De'Angelo Henderson, Mark Thompson

Crowell and Powell both ended the year on injured reserve and were New York's top rushers with 685 and 343 yards respectively. Crowell is entering the second year of a three-year deal and his cap hit rises to $5 million. Powell is an unrestricted free agent after injuring his neck midway through last season. McGuire showed some glimpses late in the season and it is possible Crowell becomes a cap casualty and the Jets seek cheaper backfield options in the draft, assuming they do not pursue Le'Veon Bell.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Chris Herndon**
**Backups:** *Neal Sterling (UFA), Jordan Leggett, Clive Walford, Eric Tomlinson

Besides Darnold, Herndon proved to be the best draft pick in the rookie class. He ranked second on the Jets with 39 receptions and 502 yards and showed flashes with seven receptions against New England in Week 12 and six catches in Week 16 vs. Green Bay. The Jets often ran two-tight end sets but their other players at the position were non-factors, making this an area due for some upgrades in the offseason. Since the Jets need some depth in this area, it seems likely they will use free agency and perhaps a late-round draft pick in an attempt to shore it up.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Robby Anderson, *Quincy Enunwa, *Jermaine Kearse (UFA)**
**Backups:** Deontay Burnett, *Rishard Matthews, J.J. Jones, Charone Peake, DeAngelo Yancey, Andre Roberts (UFA)

Anderson dealt with an ankle injury but was productive at times, forming chemistry with Darnold. Enunwa inked a contract extension and missed five games with injuries. Anderson and Enunwa combined for 88 receptions, 1,201 yards and 11 touchdowns. Kearse was a major disappointment in his second year as a Jet and likely will be allowed to sign elsewhere in unrestricted free agency. Beyond Anderson and Enunwa, the Jets could use some more depth at the position. The Jets have the quarterback in Darnold and now it's time to give him some more receiving options though acquiring disgruntled Antonio Brown may be too much of a reach.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Kelvin Beachum, *LG James Carpenter (UFA), C Spencer Long, RG Brian Winters, *RT Brandon Shell**
**Backups:** C Jonotthan Harrison (UFA), T Benjamin Ijalana (UFA), T Brett Qvale (UFA), G Dakota Dozier (UFA), T Eric Smith, C Jon Toth, G Ben Braden, T Dieugot Joseph

Carpenter and Shell ended the season with injuries and Carpenter is an unrestricted free agent who was durable before the injury. Beachum struggled at times, Winters also is durable but allowed 5.5 sacks last season. Long played through injuries in the latter portion of

**Leonard Williams**
Photo by Brad Penner-USA TODAY Sports

last season and allowed a career-high 3.5 sacks. The Jets have numerous reserves entering free agency, so this also could be an area to get reinforcements to improve depth. This also is an area where the Jets should use both their cap space in free agency and in the draft to secure an inconsistent line.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Leonard Williams, DT Steve McClendon, DE Mike Pennel**

**Backups:** DE Henry Anderson (UFA), Tarell Basham, Nathan Shephard, Bronson Kaufusi, Foley Fatukasi, Destiny Vaeao (UFA)

Four seasons in, Williams remains inconsistent as a former first-round pick after compiling 42 tackles and five sacks. Williams has yet to miss a game but ranked sixth on the team in tackles. Anderson was a solid addition in a trade with Indianapolis, especially late in the season as he enters free agency. The Jets were in the middle of the pack with 39 sacks and allowed 4.6 yards per run so an upgrade could be in order. But it will be interesting to see if Williams can live up to his potential under a new scheme with new coordinator Gregg Williams.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: ILB Darron Lee, ILB Avery Williamson OLB Jordan Jenkins, OLB Brandon Copeland (UFA)**

**Backups:** ILB Neville Hewitt, OLB Frankie Luvu, OLB Emmanuel Lamur, Tarrell Basham, ILB Anthony Wint, ILB *Kevin Pierre-Louis, OLB *Josh Martin, OLB *Jeremiah Attaochu

Williamson led the Jets in tackles, finishing with a career-best 120 in the first year of a three-year contract and will count $8 million toward the salary cap in 2019. Williamson has recorded at least 100 tackles in three of his five seasons while missing only one game. Lee was productive and improving before finishing the season on a four-game PED suspension. Jenkins also played well and was the co-leader in sacks, with seven, along with Henry Anderson. Assuming the Jets re-sign Anderson and add some depth, this could be a productive area next season.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Trumaine Johnson, CB *Morris Claiborne (UFA), SS, Jamal Adams, FS *Marcus Maye**

**Backups:** CB Buster Skrine (UFA), CB Rashard Robinson, CB Parry Nickerson, SS Terrence Brooks, FS Rontez Miles (UFA), FS Darryl Roberts (UFA), CB Derrick Jones, FS Jeremy Clark (UFA), FS *Doug Middleton (UFA)

Adams is a stud defender and the Jets need more of those after he led in the secondary in tackles. A better performance from Johnson in Year 2 of a five-year contract would help especially since Year 1 was a significant bust defined by poor coverage of opposing wideouts, injuries and being benched for the season finale. Maye ended the year on injured reserve, as did Claiborne, but with Adams, the secondary has a major piece to build around. Claiborne likely will be allowed to leave but it seems unlikely Johnson will be cut. So the Jets will need someone to replace Claiborne and hope Johnson's first season was not the norm.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### DEFENSIVE LINE

The Jets could use some more help on the line, especially with Leonard Williams struggling against double teams and showing inconsistency.

### WIDE RECEIVER

Robbie Anderson and Quincy Enunwa had nice moments but with close to $100 million in cap space, the Jets could use a playmaker at wideout.

### CORNERBACK

This will be a big year for Trumaine Johnson to live up to his big five-year contract but some additional help at the cornerback spot would certainly not hurt.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Jason Myers (UFA), P Lachlan Edwards, KR/PR Andre Roberts**

Myers was a find after being claimed off waivers in August. He won the kicking job, missed one field goal all season and only three extra points. Myers will be in demand on the free agency market and the Jets could encounter some difficulties in retaining him. Edwards continued to be steady by averaging 45.9 yards per punt. Roberts ran back a punt and kickoff return for a TD and averaged 14.1 yards on punt returns and 29.4 on kickoff returns. The Jets are actually set on special teams, especially if they can agree on a new contract with the steady Myers.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Sam Darnold | QB | USC | Poised and productive after returning from injury. Appears to be the QB Jets have been searching for. | (13/13) |
| 3 | Nathan Shepherd | DT | Fort Hays State | Finished with 15 tackles while mostly playing in reserve role and still has potential. | (16/5) |
| 4 | Chris Herndon | TE | Miami | Proved to be a steal with solid ability to catch the ball and block decently. | (16/12) |
| 6 | Parry Nickerson | CB | Tulane | Coming off multiple knee surgeries, Nickerson stayed healthy and appeared in every game. | (16/2) |
| 6 | Folorunso Fatukasi | DT | Connecticut | Appeared in one game and spent most of the year as a healthy scratch and practice player. | (16/0) |
| 6 | Trenton Cannon | RB | Virginia State | Saw time late in the year as the primary backup at running back. | (16/0) |

**SUMMARY: Despite some mid-year struggles with interceptions, Darnold was not a disappointment. Herndon was a steal in Round 4. Cannon showed some decent skills.**

Sam Darnold

# Oakland Raiders

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 336.2 (23rd)
**RUSHING:** 101.8 (25th)
**PASSING:** 234.4 (18th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 381.4 (26th)
**RUSHING:** 140.6 (30th)
**PASSING:** 240.8 (19th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

C RATING

The Raiders had a great draft in 2014 when they selected linebacker Khalil Mack, quarterback Derek Carr and guard Gabe Jackson in the first three rounds. However, only Carr and Jackson remain among the seven players they chose that year after Mack was traded to the Bears.
Wide receiver Amari Cooper was the No. 1 pick the next year, but after he was traded to the Cowboys, backup guard Jon Feliciano (who ended last season on injured reserve) is the only player left from the '15 class. Safety Karl Joseph, the first-round pick, and defensive end Shilique Calhoun and running back DeAndre Washington, are the last three left from the 2016 draft. Cornerback Gareon Conley, selected No. 1 in 2017, and two more backups, tackle David Sharpe and linebacker Marquel Lee, are all that remain from that year. General manager Reggie McKenzie was fired late last season and the numbers tell the story.
**Best Pick:** QB Derek Carr, R2 2014 — Team leader led seven game-winning fourth-quarter drives in 12-4 season in 2016.
**Worst Pick:** S Obi Melifonwu, R2 2017 — Played only seven games in two seasons before being released.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 8 | 10 | 7 | 9 | 9 |
| STARTERS | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| BACKUPS | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 3 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 2 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Raider Nation was energized and expected great things when Jon Gruden returned for his second stint as head coach in Oakland, but it turned out to be a massive disaster.

The Raiders' 2018 regular season was basically over before it started, as the team traded All-Pro outside linebacker Khalil Mack to the Chicago Bears for a first-round draft choice a few days before the opener. The reaction in the locker room was disbelief that the Raiders had traded away perhaps their best player, and team leaders from quarterback Derek Carr to linebacker Bruce Irvin, who played opposite Mack and was later released, expressed their displeasure.

Although the players said all the right things about having to put it behind them quickly and be ready to start the season against the Los Angeles Rams, that didn't happen. The Raiders never recovered, losing their first three games and seven of eight to start a 4-12 season. Going nowhere in the standings, they also traded star wide receiver Amari Cooper to the Dallas Cowboys for another No. 1 pick.

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Derek Carr**
**Backup:** AJ McCarron

Playing behind two rookie tackles on an injury-plagued offensive line, Carr started slowly as he struggled to grasp the nuances of Gruden's offense. However, he turned things around later in the season and went 10 consecutive games and 332 passes without an interception before throwing two in the finale against the Kansas City Chiefs. Carr threw a career-low 19 touchdown passes in his fifth year as the starter and was sacked a career-high 51 times while passing for 4,049 yards. He received much of the blame early, but might have been the Raiders' best player in the long run.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: *Marshawn Lynch, FB Keith Smith**
**Backups:** Doug Martin, Jalen Richard, DeAndre Washington, *Chris Warren

When Lynch went out for the season after six games because of a hamstring injury, Martin stepped in and flashed some of the form that took him to two 1,000-yard rushing seasons with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. He finished with 723 yards rushing, averaged 4.2 yards per carry and scored four touchdowns. Richard added 259 yards rushing, but his real value is as a receiver, and he tied for the team lead with 68 catches for 607 yards.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Jared Cook**
**Backups:** Lee Smith, Derek Carrier, Darren Waller

Cook became Carr's favorite target and turned in a career year in his 10th NFL season. He caught 68 passes for 896 yards, a 13.2-yard average, and six touchdowns. The Raiders also got production from Smith in the red zone, as he caught 10 passes and scored touchdowns in three straight games as Oakland played its best football late in the season.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Jordy Nelson, Marcell Ateman**
**Backups:** Seth Roberts, Derek Carrier, Dwayne Harris, Keon Hatcher, Rico Gafford, *Brandon LaFell

Nelson wasn't much of a factor in the first half of his initial season with the Raiders after a brilliant career with the Green Bay Packers, in part because of a knee injury, but he came on strong late in the year. Nelson made 38 receptions for 386 yards in the last five games of the season and finished the year with 63 catches for 739 yards and three touchdowns. Roberts came off the bench to make 45 receptions for 494 yards and two scores, while Ateman became a starter late in his rookie season after Amari Cooper was traded, and had 15 catches for 154 yards and a touchdown.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Kolton Miller, LG Kelechi Osemele, C Rodney Hudson, RG *Gabe Jackson, RT Brandon Parker**
**Backups:** T Justin Murray, T David Sharpe, G/T Denzelle Good, G Cameron Hunt, T/G Chaz Green, G *Jon Feliciano, T *Donald Penn, T *T.J. Clemmings, G/T *Denver Kirkland

After being selected to the Pro Bowl the last two seasons, Hudson was picked as an alternate in 2018 even though this might have been his most impressive year as he battled through his own ailments to hold together the injury-plagued line. It all started when Penn went on injured reserve after the fourth game because of a groin injury. Jackson, Miller and Osemele also were slowed by injuries. Miller played well early in the season and remained in the lineup most of the way despite a knee injury. However, the Raiders feel so good about their rookie tackles moving forward that they did not bring Penn back when he was eligible to return late in the season.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Frostee Rucker, DT Maurice Hurst, DT Johnathan Hankins, DE Arden Key**
**Backups:** DT P.J. Hall, DT Justin Ellis, DT Clinton McDonald, DE Kony Ealy, DT Gabe Wright, DE *Ahtyba Rubin, DE *Jacquies Smith, DE *Shilique Calhoun

**Derek Carr**
Photo by Jay Biggerstaff-USA TODAY Sports

Rucker, a 13-year veteran, did his best to hold things together on the defensive line with rookies Key, Hurst and Hall playing key roles, but the Raiders finished near the bottom in yards and points allowed, sacks and most other defensive categories. All three rookies did have their moments, with Hurst leading the team with four sacks, and while Key got close numerous times, he had only one sack — but did lead the Raiders with 11 quarterback hits. However, the Raiders believe the rookies have a lot of potential moving forward.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Tahir Whitehead, MLB Jason Cabinda, OLB Marquel Lee**

**Backups:** OLB Nicholas Morrow, OLB Kyle Wilber

Whitehead was a standout on a defense that struggled for much of the season. He led the team with 126 total tackles, including 89 solo, and nine tackles for losses. Bruce Irvin had three sacks before he was released, but the only other sack by a linebacker came from Morrow. Khalil Mack's numbers give you an idea of what the Raiders missed without him. Mack had 78 tackles and 10.5 sacks last season, and while he had a career-low 47 tackles this season, he made 12.5 sacks and forced six fumbles for the Bears. Not to mention the fact that he is double-teamed on virtually every play, opening up lanes for his teammates to make plays.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Gareon Conley, CB *Daryl Worley, S Karl Joseph, S Marcus Gilchrist**

**Backups:** S *Erik Harris, CB Nick Nelson, CB Rashaan Melvin, CB Montrel Meander, CB Bene Benwikere, CB *Leon Hall, CB *Dexter McDonald, CB *Tevin Mitchel, S *Reggie Nelson

Conley, a No. 1 pick out of Ohio State in 2017 who missed most of his rookie season because of injuries, was such a disappointment early last year that he was benched amid talk that he might be traded or released. However, the Raiders gave him a second chance and are really glad they did. Conley was one of the standouts as the defense played better at times later in the season. He led the team with 15 passes defensed and tied for the lead with three interceptions, including a pick-six. Joseph, also considered an underachiever early in the season, came on strong and finished with 48 tackles, including two sacks. Gilchrist made 58 total tackles to go with his three picks, and Melvin had 56 tackles and nine passes defensed.

# TOP 3 NEEDS

## DEFENSIVE LINE

The Raiders got production from three rookie linemen last season, need a run-stopper inside and a pass rusher to fill the void left by Khalil Mack.

## RUNNING BACK

Marshawn Lynch might not be back next season and Doug Martin will be 30, so Oakland could use a young stud in the backfield.

## WIDE RECEIVER

Jordy Nelson will be 34, Marcell Ateman remains unproven and Martavis Bryant did not work out. The Raiders need a swift wide receiver to run down the field.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Daniel Carlson, K *Eddy Pineiro, P Johnny Townsend, LS Trent Sieg, LS *Andrew DePaola, KR Dwayne Harris**

Carlson was the fifth kicker on the Raiders' roster this year when he was signed to replace injured Mike Nugent and Matt McCrane. He was cut by the Minnesota Vikings after he missed three field goals against Green Bay in Week 2. Carlson missed only one kick in the last 10 games, hitting 16 of 17 field-goal attempts and all 18 of his extra points in addition to consistently kicking off to the end zone. Townsend's job seemed to be in jeopardy early, but he improved as the season went along and finished with a respectable average of 43.2 yards per punt. Harris highlighted his season with a spectacular 99-yard touchdown on a punt return in the next-to-last game against the Denver Broncos. That helped him tie for the NFL lead with a 14.1-yard average on punt returns. He finished ninth on kickoff returns at 22.9.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

# 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Kolton Miller | T | UCLA | Miller played well at times, but allowed several sacks while playing through a knee injury. | (16/16) |
| 2 | P.J. Hall | DT | Sam Houston State | Sustained an ankle injury in the opener against the Rams. | (14/6) |
| 3 | Brandon Parker | T | North Carolina A&T | Thrown into the fire when Donald Penn went on injured reserve; experienced growing pains. | (15/12) |
| 3 | Arden Key | DE | LSU | Wound up being primary outside push rusher and applied some pressure despite having one sack. | (16/10) |
| 4 | Nick Nelson | CB | Wisconsin | Burned some when thrown into the lineup after injuries to Gareon Conley and Daryl Worley. | (10/3) |
| 5 | Maurice Hurst | DT | Michigan | Despite being limited due to injuries, had 31 tackles and led the Raiders with four sacks. | (13/10) |
| 5 | Johnny Townsend | P | Florida | After starting with a couple shanks, came on and finished respectably. | (16/0) |
| 6 | Azeem Victor | LB | Washington | Cut at the end of camp, and was briefly on Bucs and Seahawks practice squads. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Marcell Ateman | WR | Oklahoma State | After Amari Cooper trade got a chance to play and showed promise. | (7/6) |

**SUMMARY: Although several were thrown into the lineup before they were ready, most showed promise that they will develop into solid pros in the future.**

Kolton Miller

# Philadelphia Eagles

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 365.3 (14th)

**RUSHING:** 98.1 (28th)

**PASSING:** 267.2 (7th)

**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 366.2 (23rd)

**RUSHING:** 96.9 (7th)

**PASSING:** 269.3 (30th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

C+ RATING

The Eagles' class of 2016 looks like the winner the past five years, producing starters Carson Wentz, Isaac Seumalo, Wendell Smallwood, and Jalen Mills. Halapoulivaati Vaitai has been a terrific backup at both tackle positions.

What brings down the grade is the class of 2017. The Eagles needed a running back, but whiffed on Donnel Pumphrey. Sidney Jones, believed to be a steal due to a torn Achilles suffered during his pro day that caused him to miss all but one game in his rookie season, was injured most of this season, too, with a hamstring. First-round pick Derek Barnett had a marvelous rookie season but was hurt early last year.

**Best pick:** QB Carson Wentz, R1 2016 — Wentz hasn't finished the past two seasons due to injury, but he is the face of this franchise, and was having an MVP season until tearing two ligaments in his knee late in the 2017 season.

**Worst pick:** LB Marcus Smith, R1 2014 — The Eagles moved him to defensive end and he was a flop. He played 37 games in three years, but did not make a single start.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 7 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 5 |
| STARTERS | 0 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| BACKUPS | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 |

It looked like the Philadelphia Eagles would follow up on one of their greatest seasons in franchise history with one of their most disappointing.

They started the season slowly. Injuries, especially in the secondary, where they ultimately lost three of their four starters on the back end, conspired against them, preventing them from finding their stride.

They lost in New Orleans on Nov. 18 by a 48-7 score to fall to 4-6, but the Eagles won two in a row to reach 6-6. Then, another disappointment, after going to Dallas with a chance to keep their hopes of winning the NFC East alive, but losing there in overtime to drop below .500 again.

Nick Foles took over and rekindled the same magic that helped lead the Eagles to a Super Bowl LII triumph a year ago. The Eagles won three in a row with Foles stepping in for Carson Wentz, who was diagnosed with a stress fracture in his back following that overtime setback against the Cowboys.

The Eagles were rolling again, winning all three games, including victories over the Rams, in Los Angeles, and Houston. Both those teams were a combined 21-6 when that two-game stretch began. On the final day of the regular season, they recorded their first shutout in four years and got help to make the NFC playoffs as the sixth and final seed when the Chicago Bears beat the Minnesota Vikings in Minneapolis.

And just like that, the Eagles had earned the right to defend their Super Bowl title.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Carson Wentz**

**Backups:** Nick Foles, Nate Sudfeld

Wentz hasn't been able to finish the season healthy in the past two years, but he is still the team's quarterback of the future. Foles was the quarterback of the present after taking over for an injured Wentz the past two seasons. The chance that Foles returns in 2019 is slim to none – at least at the $20 million he is set to make if he is still with the team. Sudfeld is a restricted free agent, who will likely draw some offers elsewhere, but the Eagles like him enough to want to bring him back, as long as some team doesn't shower Sudfeld with an abundance of cash.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: Josh Adams**

**Backups:** Darren Sproles (UFA), Wendell Smallwood, *Jay Ajayi (UFA), *Corey Clement, Boston Scott

Perhaps the team's most unsettled position. The Eagles' offense took a big hit when Ajayi went out for the year with a knee injury after Week 5 and Sproles, who is still mulling returning for another season after he turns 36 in June, missed 10 straight games following a hamstring injury in the season opener. Clement, such a key part of the Super Bowl run as a rookie last year, was also banged up most of the season, and was finally shut down for the last month of the season. As it was, the team's rushing leader ended up being Adams, an undrafted rookie free agent from Notre Dame who spent the first two games of the year on the practice squad.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starters: Zach Ertz**

**Backups:** Dallas Goedert, Richard Rodgers (UFA), *Joshua Perkins

Ertz set an NFL record for most catches in a season by a tight end with 116. He had 1,163 yards and tied a career-high with eight touchdowns, and now has 16 touchdowns in the last two years. He is firmly entrenched as the team's starter, signed through 2021. Goedert, however, flashed the ability to be a star. A second-round draft pick from South Dakota State in 2018, he caught four touchdown passes and averaged 10.1 yards on 33 catches. He has shown strong ability to pick up yards after the catch and has proven to be a strong blocker in the run game. Rodgers spent most of the year on injured reserve before being brought back on Nov. 16. His impact was minimal, with only one catch. Perkins is signed for the NFL minimum next year and did enough good things this year (five catches, 67 yards) to warrant a look in 2019.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Alshon Jeffery, Nelson Agholor**

**Backups:** Golden Tate (UFA), *Mack Hollins, Shelton Gibson, Jordan Matthews (UFA), Mike Wallace (UFA)

Jeffery had a solid year despite missing the first three games recovering from offseason shoulder surgery. He finished with 65 catches for 863 yards and six touchdowns. Agholor had the team option in his rookie deal picked up already, and will count $9.3 million against the cap. Agholor had a career-high 64 catches for 736 yards — just 32 fewer yards than the career-high of 768 he had in 2017 — and four touchdowns. Even though the Eagles gave up a third-round pick at the trade deadline for Tate, it is unlikely he returns: same thing with Wallace and Matthews. Hollins had a promising rookie season in 2017, but sitting out the year could set him back. Gibson is the forgotten receiver, with only one catch for 48 yards on Oct. 7.

**Fletcher Cox**
Photo by Matthew Emmons-USA TODAY Sports

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Jason Peters, LG Brandon Brooks, C Jason Kelce, RG Isaac Seumalo, RT Lane Johnson**

**Backups:** G/C Stefen Wisniewski, T Halapoulivaati Vaitai, G Chance Warmack (UFA), G Matt Pryor, T *Jordan Mailata

This unit was one of the best in the NFL a season ago, but took some time to hit its stride this year due in large part to injury. Center Jason Kelce was named to the AP All-Pro team for a second straight season and at the age of 31 doesn't show any sign of slowing down. Left tackle Peters, who will turn 36 on Jan. 22, has, however. He was in and out of the lineup early on with a variety of injuries after returning this year from a torn ACL. There is some question whether or not the future Hall of Famer will return with a cap hit of $10.6 million. Vaitai has been the backup at both tackle positions since entering the NFL in 2016, but his consistency has been spotty, which could lead the Eagles into an offseason search for their next left tackle.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Brandon Graham (UFA), DE *Derek Barnett, DT Fletcher Cox, DT Tim Jernigan**

**Backups:** DE Michael Bennett, DE Chris Long (UFA), DT Haloti Ngata (UFA), DT Treyvon Hester, DE Daeshon Hall, DT Bruce Hector, DE *Josh Sweat

The Eagles could use a complementary tackle to pair alongside Cox, who finished with a career-high 10.5 sacks and was named first-team All-Pro. Jernigan could be that player, but he missed most of the season. Graham could be a critical loss if another team is willing to give him the big-money deal he is looking for in free agency. Bennett's return, following a season in which he had nine sacks, isn't a sure thing, nor is that of Long, who had 6.5 sacks and could retire.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Nigel Bradham, MLB Jordan Hicks (UFA), OLB Kamu Grugier-Hill**

**Backups:** OLB LaRoy Reynolds (UFA), OLB Nathan Gerry, MLB B.J. Bello, OLB D.J. Alexander, OLB *Paul Worrilow (UFA)

Bradham tied for the team lead in tackles with 97, but is due to count $9 million against the salary cap and can be released after June 1 to save the team $6 million on the cap. But Hicks may not return, so the Eagles cannot part ways with both players, because there is nobody on the roster ready to step up and have the kind of production Bradham and Hicks have given this team.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### RUNNING BACK

There is no true No. 1 runner on the roster, and that hurt this team in many ways, especially in short-yardage situations.

### LEFT TACKLE

There's a decent chance Jason Peters does not return at the age of 36, and Halapoulivaati Vaitai looks like nothing more than a decent backup.

### DEFENSIVE LINE

The Eagles' ends are in a state of flux with Brandon Graham and Chris Long question marks to return, and, at tackle, a running mate with Fletcher Cox is a must.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB *Ronald Darby (UFA), CB *Jalen Mills, S *Rodney McLeod, S Malcom Jenkins**

**Backups:** CB Avonte Maddox, CB Rasul Douglas, CB Sidney Jones, S Corey Graham (UFA), CB Cre'Von LeBlanc, S Tre Sullivan, CB Troy Hawkins, S *Chris Maragos (UFA)

Jenkins continues to be the stalwart of this group, leading the team in tackles for a second straight season. Otherwise, the unit was hit hard by injury. That gave players such as rookie Maddox, second-year corner Douglas and late-season signee LeBlanc the opportunity to prove they can play in this league.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Jake Elliott, P Cameron Johnston, KOR Boston Scott, PR Darren Sproles (UFA), LS Rick Lovato**

The Eagles are happy with Elliott and Johnston, who set franchise records in gross (48.2) and net (42.7) yardages in his first year punting in the league.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | Dallas Goedert | TE | South Dakota State | A rising star, catching 33 passes for 334 yards and four touchdowns. | (16/8) |
| 4 | Avonte Maddox | CB | Pittsburgh | Played both corner and safety and could challenge to start next year. | (13/9) |
| 4 | Josh Sweat | DE | Florida State | Developmental player who was put on injured reserve with three games remaining. | (9/0) |
| 6 | Matt Pryor | T | Texas Christian | Did not play a single snap all season as he transitioned from college tackle to NFL guard. | (0/0) |
| 7 | Jordan Mailata | T | None | Rugby star before trying football, but showed enough promise to be on the 53-man roster. | (0/0) |

Dallas Goedert

**SUMMARY: Goedert and Maddox played pivotal roles in the team's success this season, but the jury is still way out on the rest of the class.**

# Pittsburgh Steelers

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 403.3 (4th)
**RUSHING:** 90.3 (31st)
**PASSING:** 313.0 (2nd)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 327.2 (6th)
**RUSHING:** 96.1 (6th)
**PASSING:** 231.1 (10th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

C RATING

Look no further than the 2014 draft to explain why the Steelers missed the playoffs and why they could be in for a rebuild. Of their nine picks there is only one starter: defensive end Stephon Tuitt. The Steelers did have some bad luck with the career-ending injury to Ryan Shazier, the top pick in that draft. But other picks fizzled or were traded away. The 2015 draft wasn't much better. Four of the eight picks from that draft are already out of the league. Only Bud Dupree is a starter, and the Steelers have a decision to make on him. The 2017 draft that produced T.J. Watt and JuJu Smith-Schuster is looking great, but their presence can't make up for other mistakes that have cost the franchise.

**Best pick:** WR JuJu Smith-Schuster, R2 2017 — Already one of the best in the NFL with 2,343 yards in his first two seasons, Smith-Schuster is hands down the best receiver from his draft.

**Worst pick:** CB Artie Burns, R1 2016 — After a disastrous 2018 season the Steelers are ready to move on from Burns before his rookie contract expires.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 9 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 7 |
| STARTERS | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| BACKUPS | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 5 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 1 |

The Pittsburgh Steelers were among the Super Bowl favorites before the season, but four losses in their final six games kept the team out of the playoffs for the first time since 2013. The Steelers, after winning 13 games in 2017, finished with a 9-6-1 record and a half-game behind Baltimore in the AFC North. Head coach Mike Tomlin will remain, but there have been changes on his coaching staff and there undoubtedly will be significant change on the roster.

The biggest change could be trading disgruntled receiver Antonio Brown, who was held out of the regular-season finale against the Bengals after he went AWOL in the days leading up to the game.

The good news for the Steelers is quarterback Ben Roethlisberger announced he will return for another season. Roethlisberger will turn 37 in March, but he led the NFL in passing yards and threw a career-high 34 touchdown passes. He has a young group of receivers to work with, including JuJu Smith-Schuster, who was fifth in the league with 1,426 receiving yards.

The biggest issue facing Tomlin is how he goes about fixing the defense. The Steelers were sixth in the league in total defense, but they were tied for 16th in scoring defense and were among the worst teams in the league in forcing turnovers. Their eight interceptions tied a franchise record for fewest interceptions in a season.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Ben Roethlisberger**
**Backups:** Josh Dobbs, Mason Rudolph

Roethlisberger proved he still had it in 2018. He threw for an NFL-high 5,129 yards and a personal-best 34 touchdowns. His 16 interceptions also led the league. Many of those interceptions happened at critical times in important games down the stretch the Steelers needed to win. He has one more year remaining on his contract, but the Steelers will try to extend him this spring. Dobbs and Rudolph should stage another battle for the backup job this summer. Dobbs, a fourth-round pick in 2017, beat out Rudolph, a third-round pick in 2018, this past season.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: James Conner, FB Roosevelt Nix**
**Backups:** Jaylen Samuels, Stevan Ridley (UFA), Trey Edmunds

Running back was a big question for the Steelers entering the season, but they appear set at the position for 2019. Le'Veon Bell sat out the entire season in a contract dispute and will become a free agent in March unless the Steelers use the transition or franchise tag on him. Conner was terrific as his replacement. He had 973 rushing yards and 12 touchdowns in 13 games. When Conner was injured for three games late in the season, Samuels stepped in and proved he was a capable backup. Samuels had 223 rushing yards and 105 receiving yards in his three starts, including 172 yards from scrimmage against New England.

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Vance McDonald**
**Backups:** Jesse James (UFA), Xavier Grimble, *Jake McGee

McDonald was much more comfortable in his second season with the Steelers after being acquired in a trade with the 49ers in 2018. He set career highs in catches (50) and receiving yards (610) and tied his career high in touchdowns with four. The Steelers must decide if they want to sign James to a second contract. He had 30 catches for 423 yards. The Steelers use a lot of two-tight end sets so they could bring him back on an affordable second contract. Grimble played sparingly, and he had a costly fumble in a loss in Denver that contributed to the Steelers missing the playoffs.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Antonio Brown, JuJu Smith-Schuster**
**Backups:** James Washington, Ryan Switzer, Eli Rogers, Darrius Heyward-Bey (UFA), *Justin Hunter

Brown remains among the league's top receivers, but the Steelers could be forced to trade him after he did not play in the final game of the season because he was feuding with teammates. The Steelers are well-positioned if they want to trade Brown. Smith-Schuster was fifth in the league in receiving yards with 1,426. He looks like a budding star. The depth is a bit thin after Smith-Schuster. Washington, a second-round pick in 2018, has promise, but he endured some growing pains as a rookie. If the Steelers do deal Brown they would have to draft or sign another player to compete with Washington for the starting job opposite Smith-Schuster.

### OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Alejandro Villanueva, LG Ramon Foster (UFA), C Maurkice Pouncey, RG David DeCastro, RT *Marcus Gilbert**
**Backups:** C/G B.J. Finney, G/T Matt Feiler (UFA), T Zach Banner, T Chukwuma Okorafor, T *Joseph Cheek, T *Jerald Hawkins

This unit could undergo some major changes. Foster is 33 and unlikely to return. Finney, a restricted free agent, is six years younger and

**JuJu Smith-Schuster**
Photo by Scott R. Galvin-USA TODAY Sports

ready for a starting role. Gilbert, 31, also might not return. He has one more year remaining on his contract, but he's played in only 12 of a possible 32 games the past two seasons due to injuries and a suspension. The Steelers could save nearly $5 million by releasing him. Feiler, who started 10 games this past season, or Okorafor, who started once, would be candidates to replace him. The other three starters are set to return. DeCastro, Pouncey and Villanueva are among the best at their position in the league.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Cameron Heyward, NT Javon Hargrave, DE Stephon Tuitt**

**Backups:** DE Tyson Alualu (UFA), NT Daniel McCullers (UFA), DE L.T. Walton (UFA)

Heyward had another strong season, leading the way for a unit that helped the Steelers tie for the league lead with 52 sacks. He had eight sacks and 18 quarterback hits. Hargrave showed the biggest improvement, registering a career-high 6.5 sacks. Tuitt had 5.5 in 14 games, and the Steelers would like to see his production rise. The depth must be addressed in the offseason. Alualu is 31 and probably won't return. Walton and McCullers are unrestricted free agents, too.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB T.J. Watt, OLB Bud Dupree, ILB Vince Williams, ILB Jon Bostic**

**Backups:** OLB Anthony Chickillo (UFA), OLB Ola Adeniyi, ILB L.J. Fort, ILB Tyler Matakevich

Watt took a huge step forward in his development by recording a team-high 13 sacks. He also forced six fumbles, which tied for third in the league. Unfortunately for the Steelers, they need to find better players at their other three linebacker positions. Right outside linebacker Bud Dupree is due to make $9.2 million next season after the Steelers picked up the fifth-year option on his rookie contract. He's never had more than six sacks in a season. The Steelers likely will rescind the $9.2 million option if they can't come to terms with Dupree on a long-term deal that would shrink his yearly salary.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Joe Haden, CB Coty Sensabaugh (UFA), SS Terrell Edmunds, FS Sean Davis**

**Backups:** CB Artie Burns, CB Mike Hilton, CB Cameron Sutton, CB Brian Allen, S Morgan Burnett, S Marcus Allen, S Jordan Dangerfield, S *Nat Berhe, CB *Trey Johnson

Haden is the one bright spot in an otherwise struggling secondary. Acquired shortly before the start of the 2017 season, Haden played like a No. 1 corner for the Steelers. The Steelers must surround him with better talent and get better play from their safeties. Burns was benched midway through the season and does not appear to have a future with the Steelers. Sensabaugh could return as a depth player, but the Steelers need an upgrade at the position.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### CORNERBACK

Artie Burns, a first-round-pick in 2016, is a bust, and Joe Haden is entering the final year of his contract. It's time to address the position again.

### INSIDE LINEBACKER

The Steelers lost Ryan Shazier to a spinal cord injury in 2017 and failed to draft his replacement last year. They can't make the same mistake again.

### OUTSIDE LINEBACKER

Bud Dupree, a first-round pick in 2015, hasn't developed as the Steelers had hoped. They need to get another pass rusher to complement T.J. Watt.

Edmunds started 15 of 16 games and played more snaps than any other rookie. That experience should help him next season. Davis transitioned to free safety after two seasons at strong safety. He was inconsistent and the Steelers need more from him next season, the final year of his rookie contract.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K *Chris Boswell, K Matt McCrane, P Jordan Berry (UFA), KOR/PR Ryan Switzer, LS Kameron Canaday**

Boswell struggled after signing a four-year, $17 million contract. He made just 65 percent of his field goals and missed five extra points. The Steelers must make a decision on him by March when he is due a $2 million roster bonus. McCrane was signed to kick in the final game of the season and made all three of his field goals. Berry has been inconsistent during his four seasons, and the Steelers might try to find a better option in the draft or free agency.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Terrell Edmunds | SS | Virginia Tech | Thrust into starting role due to injuries and played more snaps than any other Steelers defender. | (16/15) |
| 2 | James Washington | WR | Oklahoma State | Had just 16 receptions, but showed signs late in the season that he'll produce in the NFL. | (14/6) |
| 3 | Mason Rudolph | QB | Oklahoma State | Lost competition for backup job in training camp; did not dress for any games. | (0/0) |
| 3 | Chukwuma Okorafor | OL | Western Michigan | Showed signs of promise; could compete for starting job next season. | (13/3) |
| 5 | Marcus Allen | FS | Penn State | Struggled with injuries in training camp and had a hard time catching up. | (2/0) |
| 5 | Jaylen Samuels | RB | North Carolina State | Started and played well late in the season when James Conner was injured. | (14/3) |
| 7 | Joshua Frazier | DL | Alabama | Did not make the 53-man roster or practice squad. | (0/0) |

**SUMMARY: Edmunds is the only pick to become a full-time starter as a rookie, but Washington and Okorafor could join him in the starting lineup next season.**

Terrell Edmunds

# San Francisco 49ers

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 360.6 (16th)

**RUSHING:** 118.9 (13th)

**PASSING:** 241.7 (15th)

**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 346.6 (13th)

**RUSHING:** 113.4 (14th)

**PASSING:** 233.3 (11th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

C+ RATING

Here's perhaps the biggest reason to question the 49ers' current decision-makers: 12 guys drafted between 2014-16 by the previous regime have found jobs with other teams after being deemed expendable. GM John Lynch has shown a fondness for making draft-day trades, with mixed results. He got a starting middle linebacker (Fred Warner) and two picks he packaged into Reuben Foster and Dante Pettis simply by moving back one spot in 2017. But he also traded into Round 1 to get Foster that same year.

**Best pick:** TE George Kittle, R5 2017 — Kittle spent much of the 2018 season breaking Vernon Davis' team records. Yes, the same Vernon Davis for whom the 49ers needed to exhaust the sixth overall pick to select in 2006.

**Worst pick:** LB Reuben Foster, R1 2017 — For a team that hasn't taken many risks under new leadership, it remains surprising that Lynch not only would take a chance on Foster, but would give up an extra draft pick in order to do it.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 12 | 10 | 11 | 10 | 9 |
| STARTERS | 0 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 2 |
| BACKUPS | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 7 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 5 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 6 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 0 |

The San Francisco 49ers charged into the 2018 season as the choice of many to be a potential surprise.

They limped out two wins worse off than 2017.

Surprise!

In a season in which very few questions were answered, the 49ers solidified their offensive line, watched a Pro Bowl-caliber tight end develop, got a bounce-back season from their biggest offseason acquisition and heard time and again that head coach Kyle Shanahan is a play-calling genius despite directing an offense that rated as average in almost every category.

But, there were other questions:

Would quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo earn his record-setting contract?

Would running back Jerick McKinnon become the franchise's next Roger Craig?

Would Marquise Goodwin or Dante Pettis develop into a much-needed No. 1 wideout?

Would guard Joshua Garnett become the anchor of the interior offensive line?

Would the three recent first-round picks finally give the team a dominant defensive front?

Would the addition of cornerback Richard Sherman help ease the burden on the rest of an undermanned secondary?

The pessimist would answer no to all six. The optimist would wonder: Can we ask again next season?

And then there's this one:

Would this be the year Reuben Foster blossomed into a star?

Unfortunately for the 49ers, that's one that won't be left to answer in 2019 after Foster was released after another alleged domestic violence incident after which he was claimed by the Washington Redskins.

With the Rams having become a dominant team and the Seahawks unwilling to accept that their window has closed, it's hard to fathom many people picking the 49ers to surprise in 2019.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: *Jimmy Garoppolo.**

**Backups:** Nick Mullens, C.J. Beathard

For all intents and purposes, the season was lost when Garoppolo blew out his knee in Week 3 at Kansas City. Probably the best thing Mullens did in his eight starts at the end of the season was perform well enough to make people forget just how mediocre Garoppolo had been in his three starts. The undrafted Mullens had some outstanding moments, but also was inconsistent. Shanahan still trusts Beathard, so it'll be interesting to see if the 49ers dangle Mullens as trade bait.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: *Jerick McKinnon, FB Kyle Juszczyk**

**Backups:** *Matt Breida, Jeff Wilson, Alfred Morris (UFA), *Raheem Mostert, Matt Dayes

Breida ranked among the NFC rushing leaders for about as long as his body could hold up, which is encouraging given that McKinnon probably has twice his talent. The tandem of McKinnon and Juszczyk seems perfect for a Shanahan offense, but there are still questions whether McKinnon can be an every-down back. Breida and Wilson played well enough to keep the 49ers from looking hard for a back this offseason ... presuming the news on McKinnon's knee is promising.

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: George Kittle**

**Backups:** Garrett Celek, Ross Dwelley

It's shocking how productive Kittle was in 2018 given the scarcity of other offensive weapons Shanahan had at his disposal. He was far-and-away the MVP of the team. Now imagine him not being the focal point of every defense if/when McKinnon comes back healthy and the 49ers add a legitimate pass-catching option on the outside. Celek established himself as an ideal No. 2 tight end with his blocking and red-zone abilities.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: *Pierre Garcon, Marquise Goodwin**

**Backups:** Dante Pettis, Kendrick Bourne, Richie James Jr., Trent Taylor, Victor Bolden, Max McCaffrey, Steven Dunbar

Pettis came on strong at the end of the season when injuries to Garcon and Goodwin created more opportunities. No doubt, he's a talent general manager John Lynch will try to build around when seeking another wideout or two this offseason. Goodwin was hampered by injuries all season, but could return as a third or fourth receiver. With a lot of money to spend and a first-round pick probably too high to consider a wideout, chances are the 49ers' top wideout next season will come out of free agency. Garcon is expected to move on.

### OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Joe Staley, LG Laken Tomlinson, C Weston Richburg, RG Mike Person (UFA), RT Mike McGlinchey**

**Backups:** C/G Erik Magnuson, G Joshua Garnett, G *JP Flynn, G/T Garry Gilliam, T Shon Coleman, T Christian DiLauro

Here's a candidate for most misinterpreted stat of the offseason: The 49ers allowed 48 sacks, the ninth-most in the NFL in 2018. It would be unwise to conclude that changes

**DeForest Buckner**
Photo by Sergio Estrada-USA TODAY Sportsw

are needed up front. Eighteen of those sacks occurred in statuesque Beathard's brief run as starting quarterback, while only 17 happened after Mullens took over for the second half of the season. Extrapolate Mullens' total for a half-season and you get 34, which would have ranked the 49ers just 10th in the league. In other words, other than possibly re-signing Person in free agency (Garnett is waiting in the wings), don't look for any changes in this solid unit. McGlinchey did everything expected of him as a first-round pick.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LDE Arik Armstead, LDT D.J. Jones, RDT DeForest Buckner, RDE Solomon Thomas**

**Backups:** DE Cassius Marsh, DE Ronald Blair, DE *Kentavius Street, DE Ryan Delaire, DT Earl Mitchell, DT Sheldon Day, DT Jullian Taylor (UFA)

Buckner developed into one of the top interior pass-rushing forces in the NFL, justifying his recent status as a first-round pick. Armstead and Thomas have yet to take that step, although both played well enough to keep around. With great depth and few injuries at the position, the club was as solid on the defensive front as the offensive front. Another first-round pick on a defensive lineman? Maybe not. This group gives Lynch trade-back options.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters:** WLB Malcolm Smith, MLB Fred Warner, SLB *Brock Coyle.

**Backups:** OLB *Dekoda Watson, OLB Mark Nzeocha (UFA), OLB James Onwualu, OLB Pita Taumoepenu, MLB Elijah Lee (UFA), MLB Tyrell Adams

The termination of Foster sets the 49ers back two years, back to when they moved up into the first round to draft the Alabama standout as a potential difference-maker at the linebacker position. It would be no surprise if the 49ers used their No. 2 overall pick in the draft to take a pass-rushing linebacker, if only such a standout existed. Warner is the most likely of the returners to start next season, but even that's no guarantee. Smith and wide receiver Garcon are the two leading candidates on the roster to be cut with guaranteed contracts.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: LCB Richard Sherman, RCB *Ahkello Witherspoon, FS *Adrian Colbert, SS *Jaquiski Tartt**

**Backups:** CB/S *Jimmie Ward (UFA), CB K'Waun Williams, CB D.J. Reed, CB Greg Mabin (UFA), CB Tyvis Powell (UFA), CB Tarvarius Moore, CB *Emmanuel Moseley, FS Tyree Robinson, SS Antone Exum (UFA), SS Marcell Harris

The only thing more encouraging than Sherman's season was his insistence he's not close to being done. That allows the 49ers to focus on the rest of the secondary, where the addition of a dependable safety will be a priority. One of the toughest decisions Lynch must make in the offseason is whether to attempt to retain Ward, who has played well when healthy, which hasn't been all that often. Witherspoon, Colbert, Tartt, Williams and Reed are keepers. The question is: How do they best complement Sherman and the new guy (or two)?

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Robbie Gould (UFA), P Bradley Pinion (UFA), LS Kyle Nelson, LS Colin Holba, KOR/PR Richie James Jr., KOR D.J. Reed, PR Trent Taylor**

Gould and Pinion have been weapons at times with Gould more often than the 49ers would have liked. But in the dime-a-dozen world of NFL kickers, there's a chance neither will be back. That said, letting them go simply to save a few bucks could cost the team a few points and yards, and the 49ers don't have many of those to spare. They can see how the Bears have struggled since they let Gould go a few seasons ago.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

# TOP 3 NEEDS

## DEFENSIVE END

The 49ers intercepted two passes all of last season, which is easily traceable to a lack of pass rush from the perimeter.

## WIDE RECEIVER

The 49ers have a No. 2 overall pick available to dangle in front of the Steelers if that's what it would take to get Antonio Brown.

## FREE SAFETY

The 49ers have a bunch of moving parts in the secondary to complement Richard Sherman. Any addition would help the returning players lock into long-term roles.

# 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Mike McGlinchey | RT | Notre Dame | Couldn't ask more from a rookie; should be a line anchor for years to come. | (16/16) |
| 2 | Dante Pettis | WR | Washington | Made some eye-opening catches late in the season; pushed Goodwin into new role in 2019. | (12/7) |
| 3 | Fred Warner | MLB | BYU | Solid numbers, but have to ask: Was it a case of *someone* having to make tackles? | (16/16) |
| 3 | Tarvarius Moore | DB | Southern Mississippi | Never distinguished himself in crowded secondary; has work to do to retain spot in 2019. | (16/2) |
| 4 | Kentavius Street | DE | North Carolina State | Impressed coaches in practice, but pre-existing injury kept him out of games. | (0/0) |
| 5 | D.J. Reed | DB/KR | Kansas State | Provided depth at two positions; probably worth keeping around. | (15/2) |
| 6 | Marcell Harris | SS | Florida | Benefitted from injury-plagued position; held own for sixth-round pick. | (8/5) |
| 7 | Jullian Taylor | DT | Temple | Never got much of a chance with defensive starters pretty much healthy all year. | (6/0) |
| 7 | Richie James Jr. | WR/KR | Middle Tennessee | Made name for himself with kickoff return for touchdown, then caught some big passes. | (13/2) |

Mike McGlinchey

**SUMMARY: No swings-and-misses, with a potential wild card should Street return to his pre-injury form.**

# Seattle Seahawks

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 353.3 (18th)

**RUSHING:** 160.0 (1st)

**PASSING:** 193.3 (27th)

**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 353.3 (16th)

**RUSHING:** 113.2 (13th)

**PASSING:** 240.1 (17th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

B- RATING

Seattle hasn't been able to come close to replicating the historic 2012 draft when they landed quarterback Russell Wilson, middle linebacker Bobby Wagner, guard J.R. Sweezy, and a bevy of impact players. But recent drafts have seen vast improvements from the dreadful 2013 class that barely made any contributions for the Seahawks. General manager John Schneider found star talent in defensive end Frank Clark and wide receiver/kick returner Tyler Lockett in the 2015 draft, while defensive tackle Jarran Reed becoming a Pro Bowl-caliber player and tackle Germain Ifedi making strides in his third season make the 2016 draft look much better. This year's class still has potential to be a game changer if running back Rashaad Penny and defensive end Rasheem Green bust out next season following tough rookie campaigns.

**Best pick:** DE Frank Clark, R2 2015 — Clark has 35.0 sacks in four seasons with the Seahawks and should be just entering his prime as a premier pass rusher.

**Worst pick:** DT Malik McDowell, R2 2017 — Injuries caused by an ATV accident prevented McDowell from playing one snap for the Seahawks before being released in July.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 9 | 8 | 10 | 11 | 9 |
| STARTERS | 1 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 0 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 5 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 0 |

Following a turbulent offseason in which several big-name stars left the team, the Seattle Seahawks weren't expected to contend in the NFC. Critics looked to be onto something when Seattle opened the season with back-to-back losses to Denver and Chicago, but the team recovered to win 10 of its final 14 games to clinch a playoff berth. The Seahawks eventually bowed out in the wild-card round with a loss to the Cowboys, ending their surprising season.

At the center of its 10-win campaign, the Seahawks' rejuvenated rushing attack led the league averaging 160 rushing yards per game. Running behind a physical offensive line, second-year back Chris Carson became the first Seahawk to eclipse 1,000 rushing yards since Marshawn Lynch in 2014. With the run game thriving, quarterback Russell Wilson put together one of his finest seasons, throwing a career-high 35 touchdowns and posting a career-best 110.9 passer rating in 2018.

Without the "Legion of Boom" secondary, Seattle managed to field a competent defense that finished a respectable 11th overall in scoring and generated 26 turnovers. Linebacker Bobby Wagner continued to elevate his play, finishing with 138 tackles and earning a first-team All-Pro nod for a third straight season. The defensive line duo of Frank Clark and Jarran Reed combined for 23.5 sacks, giving Seattle a better-than-expected pass rush.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Russell Wilson**

**Backups:** Brett Hundley (UFA), Alex McGough

Though he ranked 20th overall in pass attempts, Wilson proved to be one of the most efficient passers in the NFL in 2018. He finished second in touchdown percentage behind only Patrick Mahomes of the Chiefs, tossing a touchdown on 8.2 percent of his pass attempts. He also improved his completion percentage to above 66 percent and threw a career-high 35 touchdowns while posting a 110.9 passer rating for the season. Hundley didn't see any snaps in his first season in Seattle, while McGough spent the entire year on the practice squad.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starters: RB Chris Carson, FB Tre Madden**

**Backups:** Rashaad Penny, Mike Davis (UFA), J.D. McKissic, *C.J. Prosise, Bo Scarbrough

The Seahawks became the first team since the Steelers in 2001 to boast a 1,000-yard rusher while also having two other running backs surpass 300 yards on the ground for a single season. Leading the charge, Carson ended the season on an absolute tear, rushing for over 500 yards and five touchdowns in Seattle's last five games. Penny had an up-and-down rookie season, but showed promise with a 100-yard game against the Rams and will see an expanded role next season. Davis rushed for over 500 yards in a reserve role and should have ample suitors in free agency.

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: Ed Dickson**

**Backups:** Nick Vannett, *Will Dissly

Once he returned from the non-football injury list, Dickson provided a bit of a spark for Seattle's passing game and helped open up running room for Carson and Seattle's talented stable of backs. Vannett took a nice step forward in his third season, but it remains to be seen if he has viable long-term starter potential. Dissly flashed outstanding ball skills for a blocking tight end during the first four games before suffering a devastating knee injury. If he can make it back healthy, he's likely the future for Seattle at the position.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Doug Baldwin, Tyler Lockett**

**Backups:** David Moore, Jaron Brown, Malik Turner, *Amara Darboh

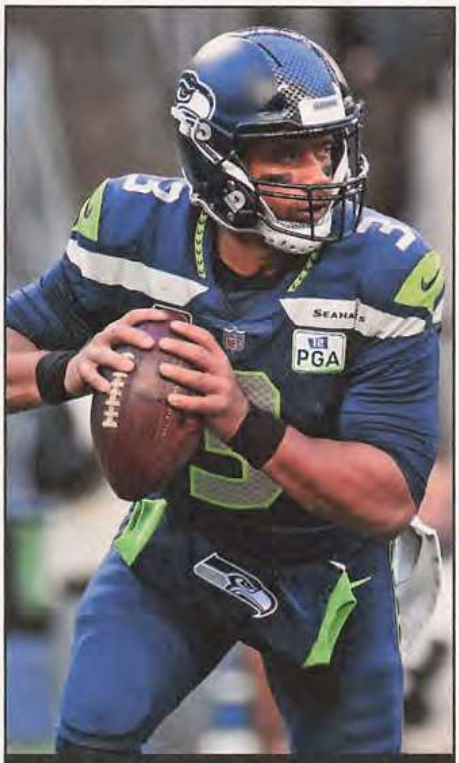
Baldwin endured an injury-ravaged season, but still managed to catch 50 passes for 618 yards and five touchdowns. However, Lockett picked up the slack and then some, as Wilson posted a perfect 158.3 passer rating throwing to the speedy receiver, who finished with 965 receiving yards and a team-best 10 touchdowns. Moore burst onto the scene midway through the season, but he disappeared late in the year, catching only four passes in Seattle's final six games. Brown only had 14 receptions, but he made them count, scoring five touchdowns.

### OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Duane Brown, LG J.R. Sweezy (UFA), C Justin Britt, RG D.J. Fluker (UFA), RT Germain Ifedi**

**Backups:** C/G Ethan Pocic, G Jordan Simmons, T George Fant, C Joey Hunt, T Elijah Nkansah, T *Jamarco Jones

The most-improved offensive line in the NFC paved the way for Seattle to lead the league in rushing, but the Seahawks face some tough decisions with Sweezy and Fluker both set to become free agents. Fluker mauled opponents when he was healthy, but he ended up missing five regular-season games due to injury and hasn't been durable, while Sweezy has had his own issues staying healthy. On the bright side, Brown, Ifedi, and Britt are all under contract through at least 2019, providing some stability up front.



**Russell Wilson**
Photo by James Snook-USA TODAY Sports

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE Frank Clark (UFA), DT Jarran Reed, DT Shamar Stephen (UFA), DE Quinton Jefferson**

**Backups:** DE Dion Jordan (UFA), DT Poona Ford, DT Nazair Jones, DE Jacob Martin, DE Branden Jackson, DE Rasheem Green, DT *Ricky Ali'ifua

Re-signing Clark, who established a career-high with 13.0 sacks this year, will be Seattle's top priority heading into the offseason. With the emergence of Ford late in the season, Stephen could be a one-and-done candidate in Seattle and allowed to leave as a free agent. This will be a big offseason for Green, who didn't play much as a rookie and will be expected to take a major leap forward in 2019. Martin will also be a player to watch after a strong finish.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB K.J. Wright (UFA), MLB Bobby Wagner, OLB Barkevious Mingo**

**Backups:** MLB Austin Calitro, OLB *Mychal Kendricks (UFA), OLB Shaquem Griffin, OLB Emmanuel Ellerbee, OLB *Emmanuel Beal

As one of the elite players in all of football, Wagner continues to find ways to improve as he builds a Hall of Fame resume. The biggest question mark for Seattle at the linebacker position revolves around Wright, who only played in six games due to a knee injury this past season. He played well in a playoff loss at Dallas, but he'll be 30 years old prior to next season and his injury history could make the team hesitant to offer a third contract. If they don't re-sign him, Griffin may get another crack at the weak-side spot with another off-season under his belt. Kendricks could also be an option if his legal issues don't lead to extensive prison time.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Shaquill Griffin, CB Tre Flowers, FS *Earl Thomas (UFA), SS Bradley McDougald**

**Backups:** CB Justin Coleman (UFA), FS Tedric Thompson, SS *Delano Hill, CB Akeem King, SS Maurice Alexander (UFA), CB Neiko Thorpe, CB Kalan Reed, SS Shalom Luani, FS *T.J. Mutcherson

With the bridge between the player and organization burned beyond repair, Thomas will head into free agency looking to become the highest-paid free safety in the NFL. It will be interesting what level of offers he receives considering his age and injury issues. In his absence, Thompson showed some signs of progress, while McDougald served as the glue guy in the secondary after Flowers and Griffin went through their growing pains at the cornerback spots. Coleman has been a turnover-generating machine as Seattle's slot corner, but his price may exceed what the team can afford in free agency. Hill gave Seattle a lift late in the season before succumbing to a hip injury and could factor in as a starter next season.

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### DEFENSIVE END

Frank Clark had a monster season and needs to be re-signed, but the Seahawks have to find edge rushing help to complement him.

### FREE SAFETY

With Earl Thomas departing, competition must be found for Tedric Thompson, who struggled with inconsistency in his first season as a starter.

### TIGHT END

If Will Dissly makes it all the way back from a ruptured patellar tendon, the Seahawks will be in good shape at tight end, but they need to find insurance.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

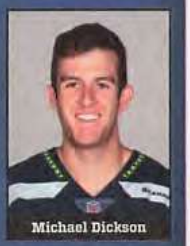
**K Sebastian Janikowski (UFA), P Michael Dickson, KOR/PR Tyler Lockett, LS Tyler Ott**

The 40-year-old Janikowski nailed three game-winning kicks this year, but he suffered a significant hamstring injury in Seattle's playoff game and given his well-documented back problems, the Seahawks will likely be on their third kicker in three years when camp opens in late July. Dickson earned first-team All-Pro recognition and the franchise should be set at punter for years to come. Lockett still remains a dangerous return specialist, but his importance on offense may lead to Seattle continuing to look for alternatives to keep him fresh.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Rashaad Penny | RB | San Diego State | Flashed first-round talent, but stuck behind Carson and Davis on depth chart. | (14/0) |
| 3 | Rasheem Green | DE | USC | Sparingly used, the 21-year-old is still a major work in progress for Seahawks. | (10/0) |
| 4 | Will Dissly | TE | Washington | Shined with 156 receiving yards and two touchdowns before season-ending knee injury. | (4/4) |
| 5 | Shaquem Griffin | LB | UCF | Key special teams player who needs more seasoning to make impact defensively. | (16/1) |
| 5 | Tre Flowers | CB | Oklahoma State | Hard-hitting converted safety showed great progress as cover corner in 15 starts. | (15/15) |
| 5 | Michael Dickson | P | Texas | Nobody is laughing about Seattle trading up for him after he was named first-team All-Pro. | (16/16) |
| 5 | Jamarco Jones | T | Ohio State | Showed promise in preseason, but severe ankle injury landed him on injured reserve in August. | (0/0) |
| 6 | Jacob Martin | DE | Temple | Recorded 3.0 sacks in 16 games and could have much larger role in 2019. | (16/0) |
| 7 | Alex McGough | QB | FIU | Spent the entire year on practice squad and could compete for roster spot next year. | (0/0) |



Michael Dickson

**SUMMARY: Top picks didn't produce as hoped, but Dissly, Griffin, Flowers, Martin, and Dickson provide a surprisingly deep, talented draft class.**

# Tampa Bay Buccaneers

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 415.5 (3rd)
**RUSHING:** 95.2 (29th)
**PASSING:** 320.3 (1st)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 383.4 (27th)
**RUSHING:** 123.9 (24th)
**PASSING:** 259.4 (26th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

**B-**
RATING

The best pick under general manager Jason Licht may have been his first one – wide receiver Mike Evans, a first-round pick from Texas A&M. Evans is one of only three Pro Bowl players selected by the Bucs in five years, including quarterback Jameis Winston and middle linebacker Kwon Alexander, who each made it once. The Bucs' defense has struggled whenever Alexander has been off the field with injuries. Having plucked 10 starters in 33 picks is not a great batting average, but more are on the horizon. Of course, the worst pick was using a second-rounder in 2016 on kicker Roberto Aguayo. Where the drafts also fell down is the lack of defensive linemen.

**Best pick:** WR Mike Evans, R1 2014 — He's had four straight 1,000-yard seasons to start his career and should continue to be a top target of quarterback Jameis Winston.

**Worst pick:** K Roberto Aguayo, D2 2016 — Made only 71 percent of his field goals. He was released at the start of the 2017 season and is out of the league.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 6 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 7 |
| STARTERS | 1 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 6 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 |

There were two significant issues that resulted in the Tampa Bay Buccaneers experiencing a 5-11 season in 2018. Start with turnovers, especially interceptions. Bucs quarterbacks Jameis Winston and Ryan Fitzpatrick combined for 36 interceptions. Meanwhile, the defense only produced nine.

The second thing was the defense, particularly under defensive coordinator Mike Smith, who was fired after five games with the Bucs last in the NFL with 34.2 points per game and only one interception. The Bucs were an astounding minus-18 in giveaway/takeaway ratio, which ranked next to last in the NFL. Things got better after linebackers coach Mark Duffner took over, but by then, injuries had taken hold.

Winston was suspended the first three games of the season and the Bucs started 2-1 under Fitzpatrick, who passed for at least 400 yards and three touchdowns in each game. The Fitz-magic wore off. Winston returned to the lineup, was dreadful and benched although he returned again later in the season.

The Bucs were still able to pile up yards. In fact, head coach Dirk Koetter produced the best offense in club history. They averaged 415.5 yards per game and 320.3 passing, which was first in the league. But yards don't win games, points do. Koetter was fired after the disappointing season ended, and the club lured former Arizona Cardinals head coach Bruce Arians out of retirement to replace him.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Jameis Winston**
**Backups:** Ryan Fitzpatrick (UFA), Ryan Griffin (UFA)

Winston was suspended the first three games, made three starts, benched for three more and then finished out the season strong. He went 3-8 overall. But after beginning the season with eight touchdown passes and 11 interceptions, he finished with 11 touchdown passes and only three interceptions, including a Hail Mary. He improved in most categories but ball security is a problem. He will get a fifth-year and a club option of $20.92 million to prove his worth. Winston ended the season with a 90.2 passer rating, while Fitzpatrick was at 100.4. Both Fitzpatrick and Griffin are free agents.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: Peyton Barber**
**Backups:** Ronald Jones, Jacquizz Rodgers (UFA), *Shaun Wilson

Barber was the workhorse back running behind a suspect offensive line. He had 1,105 yards from scrimmage, including 871 yards rushing. The Bucs averaged 3.9 yards per carry, which was the second-worst in the NFL. Rookie Ronald Jones was a flat zero last season. He couldn't get on the field and when he did, he made no plays. Rodgers was the team's third-down back for most of the year. Jones gained just 44 yards on 23 attempts and scored one touchdown. Rodgers had 38 receptions for 304 yards in his third-down role and rushed for just 106 yards (3.2 average).

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starters: *O.J. Howard, Cameron Brate**
**Backups:** Antony Auclair, *Alan Cross, Tanner Hudson

Howard was on pace for a Pro Bowl season before a foot and ankle injury torpedoed his year. He finished with 565 yards on 34 catches and five touchdowns in only 10 games. He improved as a blocker in the run game and played nearly every snap when active. Brate battled an undisclosed injury, but still finished with 30 catches for 289 yards and six touchdowns, making him one of the team's biggest red-zone targets. Auclair had more playing time but was used mostly in blocking situations.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

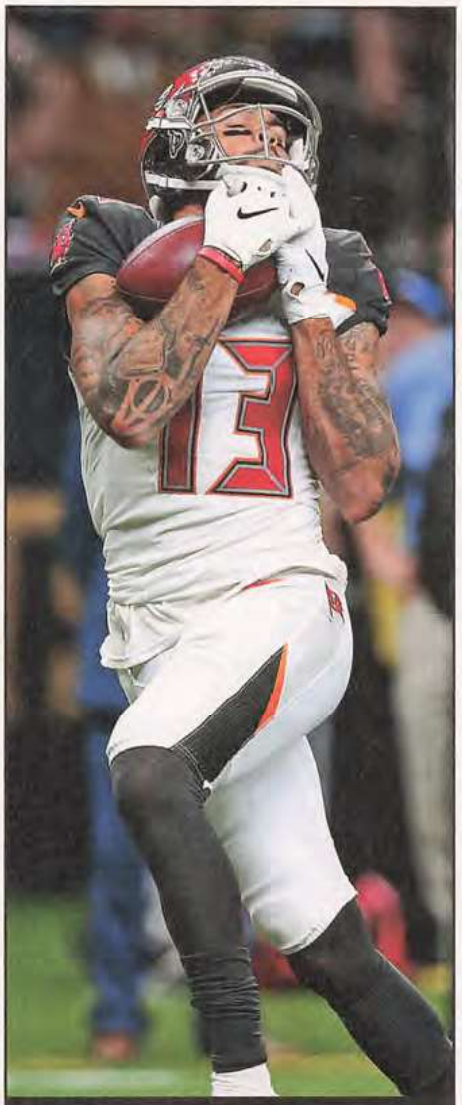
**Starters: Mike Evans, DeSean Jackson**
**Backups:** Chris Godwin, Adam Humphries (UFA), Justin Watson, Bobo Wilson, *Sergio Bailey

Evans had a career season and just keeps getting better. He set a club record with 1,524 yards and also had eight touchdown receptions. It's the fourth straight year he's had at least 1,000 yards receiving to earn a spot in the Pro Bowl. Humphries started slow but had a career-high 76 catches and five touchdowns. Godwin battled some injuries but improved and could be a great No. 2 receiver next year. Jackson got off to a hot start then fizzled when Winston took over. He played in only one of the final four games and most likely won't return in 2019. He did have 41 receptions for 774 yards (18.9 average and four touchdowns.

### OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Donovan Smith, LG Ali Marpet, C Ryan Jensen, RG Caleb Benenoch (UFA), RT Demar Dotson**
**Backups:** C Alex Cappa, T Mike Liedtke, T Leonard Wester, G *Evan Smith

As a group, the Bucs underachieved, especially in the run game. Tampa Bay ranked 31st overall with a 3.9-yard rushing average and also averaged under 100 yards a game at 95.2. Marpet was the most consistent offensive lineman. Jensen was a good addition but led all NFL linemen in penalties. The Bucs have a hole at right guard where Benenoch was a



**Mike Evans**
Photo by Chuck Cook-USA TODAY Sports

turnstile. Dotson battled injuries all season but made it through a 10th NFL season.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LDE Carl Nassib, DT Vita Vea, DT Gerald McCoy, RDE Jason Pierre-Paul**

**Backups:** DE Noah Spence, DE William Gholston, DT Beau Allen, DE Vinny Curry, DE Rakeem Nunez-Roches, DT *Stevie Tu'ikolovatu, DT *Mitch Unrein

The Bucs got a lift from new defensive line coach Brentson Buckner and improved from a league worst 22 sacks in 2017 to 38 sacks, which tied for 19th in the NFL. Buckner won't be back after the change in head coaches. The Bucs rebuilt the defensive line and the trade for Pierre-Paul paid off with 12.5 sacks. But the biggest discovery was Nassib, who was claimed off waivers from the Browns. He became a starter and finished with a career-high 6.5 sacks. Nassib was featured during the Browns' appearances on Hard Knocks and was a surprise cut at the end of training camp.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: WLB Lavonte David, MLB *Kwon Alexander (UFA), SLB Kendall Beckwith**

**Backups:** OLB Devante Bond, OLB Riley Bullough, OLB Cameron Lynch, OLB Adarius Taylor, MLB *Joe Walker, OLB *Jack Cichy

The Bucs missed Alexander, who suffered a season-ending torn ACL. David had an outstanding year and led the team in tackles for the sixth time in seven seasons. From there, the Bucs had to mix and match and eventually resorted to using a safety as a third linebacker in nickel situations. Beckwith spent the season on reserve/non-football injury with an ankle injury. He practiced for three weeks in November, but wasn't considered recovered enough to be activated.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: LCB Brent Grimes (UFA), RCB *Vernon Hargreaves, SS *Chris Conte, FS *Justin Evans.**

**Backups:** CB Carlton Davis, CB M.J. Stewart, S Jordan Whitehead, S Isaiah Johnson, CB Ryan Smith, CB De'Vante Harris, S Andrew Adams

The Bucs were decimated by injury in the secondary. Conte suffered a season-ending knee injury and Evans also finished the year on injured reserve. Hargreaves played only one game before a shoulder injury ended his season. The Bucs were forced to rely on rookies and free agents. Adams led the team with four interceptions, including three in one game. Grimes had no interceptions and played like he was disinterested.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Cairo Santos, P Bryan Anger, PR Adam Humphries, KOR Jacquizz Rodgers, KOR Bobo Wilson**

Chandler Catanzaro, a free agent from the Jets, continued the Bucs legacy of bad kicking. He made 16 of 20 field-goal attempts and missed five extra points before he was released. Santos took over and did a good job down the stretch. Anger averaged 45.0 yards per punt with a 38.9 net. Humphries was steady and the Bucs got a lift late in the season from Wilson as a kickoff returner. He averaged 28.4 yards on 10 returns.

**Asterisk indicates player that ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### DEFENSIVE LINE

The Bucs traded for Jason Pierre-Paul and made a good pickup off waivers with Carl Nassib, but Gerald McCoy is entering his 10th season and JPP is 31.

### CORNERBACK

With Brent Grimes likely to be no longer playing for the Bucs, they need a ball-hawking cornerback to match the division's top receivers.

### OFFENSIVE LINE

The Bucs have no right guard and right tackle Demar Dotson is entering his 11th season. Enough said.

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Vita Vea | DT | Washington | Missed seven weeks including all of the preseason but finished strong. | (13/8) |
| 2 | Ronald Jones | RB | Southern Cal | Complete bust of a rookie year with no production and some hamstring issues. | (8/0) |
| 2 | M.J. Stewart | CB | North Carolina | Competed hard as a slot cornerback but limited by injuries. | (11/5) |
| 2 | Carlton Davis | CB | Auburn | Long, cover corner who played well overall but also bit by the injury bug. | (13/12) |
| 3 | Alex Cappa | G | Humboldt State | Showed promise at right guard and as a swing tackle in last part of the season. | (6/0) |
| 4 | Jordan Whitehead | S | Pittsburgh | Athletic safety who started the bulk of the games; a reliable tackler. | (15/11) |
| 5 | Justin Watson | WR | Penn | Used primarily as a special teams player in a crowded receiver position. | (12/0) |
| 6 | Jack Cichy | LB | Wisconsin | Was coming on well before a season-ending knee injury. | (6/0) |

Vita Vea

**SUMMARY: Young DBs gained experience but struggled, Jones was a bust and Vea redeemed himself in the final four games. Overall a huge disappointment.**

# Tennessee Titans

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 312.4 (25th)
**RUSHING:** 126.4 (7th)
**PASSING:** 185.9 (29th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 333.4 (8th)
**RUSHING:** 116.4 (18th)
**PASSING:** 216.9 (6th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

C+ RATING

The first two years of the breakdown belong to former general manager Ruston Webster. The past three have been under the auspices of Jon Robinson. Webster didn't leave the cupboard bare, drafting left tackle Taylor Lewan and quarterback Marcus Mariota, though six of nine 2015 picks are out of the NFL. Robinson has been able to pull a few good picks from the middle rounds like safety Kevin Byard and linebacker Jayon Brown, but has had some misses too, most notably Kevin Dodd. Robinson's picks make up the bulk of the roster, ranging from key players like Adoree' Jackson, Derrick Henry, Jack Conklin, Jayon Brown and Rashaan Evans to role players like Tajae Sharpe, Jonnu Smith and LeShaun Sims.

**Best pick:** S Kevin Byard, R3 2016 — Already an All-Pro in 2017, Byard has been a ball hawk and is one of the best safeties in the NFL.

**Worst pick:** OLB Kevin Dodd, R2 2016 — Wasted pick on a guy who proved to have a low motor and is out of the league. Could have had Myles Jack or Jaylon Smith with this pick.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 6 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 4 |
| STARTERS | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| PRACTICE SQUAD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 2 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 0 |

The Tennessee Titans finished 9-7 for the third straight season, but missed the postseason for the second time in three seasons. Mike Vrabel took over as head coach from Mike Mularkey, whom the Titans questionably fired after a playoff win the season before. While Vrabel endured a lot in his first year, the biggest question regarding the Titans in 2018 and going forward centered on the health of quarterback Marcus Mariota. Mariota suffered nerve damage in his throwing arm in the season opener, and was sidelined three different times with the injury. In fact, Mariota's unavailability in the regular-season finale vs. the Colts proved to be a big factor in the Titans missing the playoffs. An independent doctor warned that Mariota could risk permanent nerve damage if he played and took the wrong kind of hit.

Backup Blaine Gabbert filled in and threw a costly interception that factored into the season-ending loss. Plus, Mariota enters the final year of his rookie contract with the Titans still not certain if he can stay healthy enough and be consistent enough to be a top-tier quarterback.

All of that, plus a new offensive coordinator once again after Matt LaFleur was hired to be Green Bay's head coach, made the 2018 season one of question marks for the Titans at the most important position on the field heading into 2019. Vrabel hired tight ends coach Arthur Smith to coordinate the offense and he will be the fifth coordinator in five seasons for Mariota.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

## QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: Marcus Mariota**
**Backups:** Blaine Gabbert, Austin Davis (UFA)

The Titans seem to believe that Mariota can be a franchise quarterback, despite his injuries and occasional struggles. In 2016, Mariota seemed on his way with 26 touchdown passes and nine interceptions. But in the past two years combined, Mariota has thrown just 24 touchdowns and has been picked off 23 times. Some of that is a lack of playmakers, some is injury-related and the other part is Mariota has been through four play-callers in four years — and in 2019 will work with a fifth. Gabbert was OK in spots, but fans soured on him after a costly interception vs. the Colts in a critical game. The Titans might be better served to upgrade at No. 2, given Mariota's injury history. Davis had two stints on the roster while Mariota was ailing.

## RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: Derrick Henry**
**Backups:** Dion Lewis, *David Fluellen, Jeremy McNichols

Hard to believe now that the Titans had Lewis as their primary back for the first half of the season, while Henry was unable to gain much traction as a 10-to-12-carry per game backup. Being unable to rely on the passing game, the Titans turned to Henry, who carried the offense the final month of the season, gaining 600-plus yards in the final five games to finish at 1,059 for the year. Henry's play allowed Lewis to settle back into the change-of-pace role for which he is the best suited. Fluellen, a special teams mainstay, was lost to a knee injury. McNichols was signed late to the roster and was a regular inactive.

## TIGHT ENDS

**Starters: *Delanie Walker, Luke Stocker (UFA)**
**Backups:** *Jonnu Smith, Anthony Firkser, MyCole Pruitt

Walker, a Pro Bowl tight end, was lost in the first game of the season with a broken fibula and missed the season. His return is key for 2019 in the passing game. Smith improved with the extra playing time that came his way, but then was injured himself. Stocker was better as a blocker, but also had a couple of timely catches. Firkser, who made the roster with a strong preseason, and Pruitt, signed after Walker went down, each had moments where they contributed to the offense.

## WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Corey Davis, Taywan Taylor**
**Backups:** Tajae Sharpe, Darius Jennings, Cameron Batson

A perennial problem area for the Titans, Davis showed some growth in Year 2 with 65 catches, but more is needed for him to justify being the fifth pick in the draft. Taylor was inconsistent, but had some big plays as the Titans' speed receiver. Sharpe was bothered by an ankle injury in the second half of the year as his productivity declined. Jennings' best contributions were as a kickoff returner, while Batson was a surprise to make the initial 53-man roster.

## OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Taylor Lewan, LG Quinton Spain (UFA), C Ben Jones, RG Josh Kline, RT *Jack Conklin**
**Backups:** C/G Corey Levin, T Dennis Kelly, T Tyler Marz, G Aaron Stinnie, T Austin Pasztor, G/T *Kevin Pamphile (UFA)

This group was inconsistent for much of the year, but found its stride late. Lewan, the highest-paid tackle in the league, was a Pro Bowl pick. Conklin never got on track coming off a knee injury, then reinjured it late in the year. Kelly was solid in his stead,

**Derrick Henry**
Photo by Jim Brown-USA TODAY Sports

enough that some speculate Conklin could be shifted to guard. Kline got an extension last offseason, but struggled at times. Jones and Spain had their moments of inconsistency as well.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: DE *Jurrell Casey, NT Austin Johnson, DE DaQuan Jones**

**Backups:** NT Bennie Logan (UFA), DE/NT Darius Kilgo, DE Matt Dickerson

Casey had another outstanding season, until a knee injury shelved him in the final week. He led the Titans with seven sacks, and his absence showed the need to upgrade around him on the line. Jones and Johnson didn't seem as productive in 2018 as they had been the previous season, and the thought is that another player with some rush skills is needed to help bolster Casey. Logan is a free agent, and the Titans may shop elsewhere for depth.

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: OLB Brian Orakpo (UFA), OLB Derrick Morgan (UFA), ILB Wesley Woodyard, ILB Rashaan Evans**

**Backups:** OLB Harold Landry, ILB Jayon Brown, ILB Daren Bates, ILB Will Compton (UFA), OLB Sharif Finch, OLB Komalei Correa, ILB *Nate Palmer (UFA), OLB LaTroy Lewis.

The Titans will get a makeover at outside linebacker as Orakpo retired and Morgan might not be re-signed. If Morgan is re-signed it will be in a reduced role. Landry showed promise with 4.5 sacks, as did Finch, who did OK in spot duty. Woodyard remained steady inside, but 2018 first-round pick Evans and Brown (six sacks) have the Titans excited about the future of the inside position.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: CB Adoree' Jackson, CB *Logan Ryan, SS Kenny Vaccaro (UFA), FS Kevin Byard**

**Backups:** CB Malcolm Butler, S *Johnathan Cyprien, S Kendrick Lewis (UFA), CB LeShaun Sims, CB Kenneth Durden, CB *Tye Smith, S Dane Cruikshank, S Brynden Trawick (UFA), CB Josh Kalu

Ryan was the most consistent of the cornerbacks, but Jackson was solid and Butler, after a rough start, settled down in the second half of the season. Byard continues to play at a high level at safety. Vaccaro, signed after Cyprien was lost with a knee injury, played well enough that the Titans should consider signing him to an extension. Sims provides decent corner depth, and Smith's return could bolster that even more.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Ryan Succop, P Brett Kern, KOR Darius Jennings, PR Adoree' Jackson, LS Beau Brinkley**

Kern earned his second Pro Bowl invite and was again outstanding. Brinkley does solid work as the long snapper, and Succop was mostly solid, despite a late-season slump. Jennings provided a spark on kickoffs, averaging nearly 32 yards per return. Jackson seemed unsure of himself on punt returns, often fair catching returnable balls.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### EDGE RUSHER

With Brian Orakpo retired, and Derrick Morgan a free agent, the Titans need numbers here. Too often pressure had to be manufactured by blitzing. A true edge rusher could transform a solid defense into something special.

### LEFT GUARD

Quinton Spain is a free agent, and the Titans may need to upgrade at both center and guard in the offseason.

### WIDE RECEIVER

Perpetually a need position, the Titans could use a veteran presence to mentor a young group.

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Rashaan Evans | ILB | Alabama | Started slowly due to hamstring injury, but by end of season was playing like No. 1 pick should. | (15/7) |
| 2 | Harold Landry | OLB | Boston College | His speed is outstanding and helped produce 4.5 sacks, but needs a counter move. | (16/3) |
| 5 | Dane Cruikshank | S | Arizona | Had some injury issues, but made an impact as a special teams performer. | (12/0) |
| 6 | Luke Falk | QB | Washington State | Lacked arm strength and was cut in camp. Claimed by Dolphins. | (0/0) |

**SUMMARY: GM Jon Robinson gambled, trading up for both Evans and Landry, and giving up his third- and fourth-round picks in the process.**

Harold Landry

# Washington Redskins

## 2018 STATS

**TOTAL OFFENSE:** 299.7 (28th)
**RUSHING:** 110.9 (17th)
**PASSING:** 188.8 (28th)
**TOTAL DEFENSE:** 353.4 (17th)
**RUSHING:** 116.3 (17th)
**PASSING:** 237.1 (15th)

## 5-Year Breakdown

B- RATING

The Redskins have actually drafted reasonably well this decade and have found some gems the past five years. Right guard Brandon Scherff is a Pro Bowler. Defensive end Jonathan Allen looks like one and Daron Payne had a fine rookie season. Jamison Crowder became a fine slot receiver, and he and defensive end Matt Ioannidis have provided good value for fourth- and fifth-round picks. Morgan Moses is a valuable right tackle who never misses games. But there are other concerns. Wide receiver Josh Doctson has yet to play like a first-round pick and running backs Matt Jones and Samaje Perine have been busts.

**Best pick:** DL Jonathan Allen, R1 2017 — No. 17 overall pick surpasses 2015 first-rounder Brandon Scherff, a two-time Pro Bowler, because of the position where he was drafted and his overall dominant second season.

**Worst pick:** S Su'a Cravens, R2 2016 — Struggled through concussions and homesickness during his rookie year and then on the eve of the 2017 season he said he was retiring. Too high a pick to lose in 18 months.

| | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL PICKS | 8 | 10 | 7 | 10 | 8 |
| STARTERS | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| BACKUPS | 0 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 7 |
| OTHER TEAMS | 4 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| OUT OF LEAGUE | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

A once-promising 2018 season fell apart after nine games and now the Washington Redskins, 7-9 for a second straight year, must sift through the rubble of another losing season.

That's not easy to do given Washington had a NFL-high 23 players on injured reserve, and it lost quarterbacks Alex Smith and Colt McCoy to broken legs in a span of 15 days when the team was 6-3 and in first place in the NFC East.

The offense was mildly disappointing up until that point, but the defense was improved. But the quarterback attrition led to a 1-6 finish and there were ugly squabbles between the coaching staff and safety D.J. Swearinger, who was cut despite four interceptions, and linebacker Zach Brown, who was benched.

Season-ending injuries to Pro Bowl right guard Brandon Scherff, left guard Shawn Lauvao and wide receiver Paul Richardson hurt the NFL's lowest-scoring offense. The Redskins never even saw rookie running back Derrius Guice (torn ACL).

The defense actually showed some improvement against the run and pass and forced more turnovers than recent years. But that was only good enough to finish just below average in the rankings. That's been a hallmark of the Jay Gruden era and leaves the Redskins wondering if they have what it takes to make the playoffs.

**Depth chart as of Super Bowl LIII**

### QUARTERBACKS

**Starter: *Alex Smith**

**Backups:** *Colt McCoy, Josh Johnson (UFA), Mark Sanchez (UFA)

A brutal run of injuries at the most important position. Smith sustained a gruesome broken leg in a Week 11 loss to Houston and his status for 2019 is uncertain after infection set in after surgery. He's home and doing better, but no one knows what to expect from Smith going forward. McCoy also broke his leg, but that injury was far less severe. He only started two games before he, too, went on injured reserve. Sanchez signed and started just one game before getting replaced by Johnson, who showed unexpected spark as the starter in the final three games, which included a 16-13 win at Jacksonville.

### RUNNING BACKS

**Starter: Adrian Peterson**

**Backups:** Chris Thompson, *Derrius Guice, *Rob Kelley, Samaje Perine, Byron Marshall

Guice, Washington's second-round pick in 2018, was on his way to starting as a rookie before tearing the ACL in his left knee. Lucky for them Peterson was still unsigned. At age 33, the future Hall of Famer stabilized the position with 1,042 rushing yards and seven touchdowns, his best season since 2015. Thompson was productive when healthy, but rib injuries limited him to 10 games. Kelley, the Redskins' leading rusher in 2016, was on injured reserve by Week 2 because of a toe injury. Perine, a 2017 fourth-round pick, has proven a bust and appeared in only five games.

### TIGHT ENDS

**Starter: *Jordan Reed**

**Backups:** Vernon Davis, Jeremy Sprinkle, J.P. Holtz, Matt Flanagan, *Manasseh Garner

Reed ended the year on injured reserve once again with a toe injury — although he at least played 13 games, the second-most in any of his six seasons. Reed led Washington in receptions (54) and yards (558), but that was a low bar and he hasn't come close to repeating his magical 2015 season (87 catches, 952 yards, 11 touchdowns). Davis dropped from 43 receptions to 25 at age 34, but he did have two touchdowns. Sprinkle played in every game as the blocking tight end, but had a minimal role in the offense.

### WIDE RECEIVERS

**Starters: Josh Doctson, *Paul Richardson, Jamison Crowder (UFA)**

**Backups:** Michael Floyd (UFA), Jehu Chesson, Darvin Kidsy, *Maurice Harris (UFA), *Cam Sims, *Robert Davis, *Trey Quinn

Doctson (44 catches, 532 yards, two touchdowns) still has not lived up to his status as a 2016 first-round pick. Richardson (20 catches, 262 yards), a free-agent signing expected to help replace the big-play ability lost when DeSean Jackson left two years ago, only made it through Week 9 before going on injured reserve with a shoulder injury that had plagued him since training camp. He did average 13.1 yards per catch. Crowder (29 catches, 388 yards) missed seven games with an ankle sprain and was off his career norms. Depth at the position was decimated by injuries to Davis, Sims and Quinn early in the year. Harris (28 catches, 304 yards) was a valuable possession receiver and special-teams player.

### OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LT Trent Williams, LG *Shawn Lauvao (UFA), C Chase Roullier, RG *Brandon Scherff, RT Morgan Moses**

**Backups:** LT Ty Nskeke (UFA), LG *Arie Kouandjio (UFA), G Tony Bergstrom (UFA), G Kyle Fuller, G Zac Kerin (UFA), G Luke Bowanko (UFA), G *Tyler Catalina, T *Geron Christian Sr., G *Jonathan Cooper (UFA), T *Austin Howard (UFA), C Tony Bergstrom, T Timon Parris

Injuries again ravaged what should have been a good offensive line with Williams,

**Adrian Peterson**
Photo by Kim Klement-USA TODAY Sports

Scherff and Moses leading the way. Instead, Scherff tore his pectoral muscle in Week 9. Lauvao tore his ACL in Week 9. They signed Cooper and he started four games before tearing his biceps. They signed Howard (hip), but he appeared in just five games before landing on injured reserve. Williams endured knee and thumb surgeries, but did play 13 games. Moses and Roullier started all 16 games. Nsekhe was again valuable in relief of Williams at left tackle in the three games he missed and later when moved to guard. Bergstrom started eight games in place of Scherff.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

**Starters: LDE Matt Ioannidis, NT Daron Payne, RDE Jonathan Allen**

**Backups:** Stacy McGee (UFA), DE Caleb Brantley, NT Tim Settle

This was the only group that avoided injury. The Redskins' investment up front has paid off. Allen stayed healthy in his second season and had eight sacks. He and former Alabama teammate Payne, the 2018 first-round pick, were a big reason the Redskins finished 17th against the run despite playing in a NFC East featuring the league's top two runners (Ezekiel Elliott, Saquon Barkley).

## LINEBACKERS

**Starters: WLB Ryan Kerrigan, ILB Zach Brown, ILB Mason Foster, SLB Preston Smith (UFA)**

**Backups:** OLB Pernell McPhee (UFA), ILB Zach Vigil, OLB Ryan Anderson, ILB Josh Harvey-Clemons, ILB Shaun Dion Hamilton, OLB Marcus Smith, ILB Marquis Flowers (UFA), *Cassanova McKinzy

Kerrigan had yet another big season with 13 sacks though Smith was a disappointment with only four. McPhee was a non-factor after signing as a free agent. Foster led the Redskins in tackles (131). Brown was benched late in the season and feuded with the coaching staff openly. He might not return. Harvey-Clemons proved reliable in nickel coverage and Dion Hamilton came on strong late in the season to take some of Brown's playing time.

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

**Starters: LCB Josh Norman, RCB *Quinton Dunbar, FS Deshazor Everett, SS Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (UFA)**

**Backups:** LCB Fabian Moreau, RCB Greg Stroman, LCB Adonis Alexander, SS *Montae Nicholson, RCB *Josh Holsey, LCB *Danny Johnson, FS *Troy Apke, S Harlan Miller, LCB Alex Carter, SS Jeremy Reaves

A rebound year from Norman with three interceptions and three forced fumbles. But the Redskins went young with their corners and that hurt once Dunbar went to injured reserve with a nerve injury in his leg. D.J. Swearinger had four interceptions and had stabilized the safety spot the past two years. But repeated clashes with coaches finally forced the Redskins to cut him in December and there was no obvious replacement. Nicholson, who began the year as a starter, fell out of favor in midseason and Washington traded for Clinton-Dix. Nicholson then went on the reserve list after an arrest following a physical altercation outside a bar. Rookies Stroman, Alexander and Johnson all got good experience. Moreau took a step forward in his second year. Apke, a 2018 fourth-round pick, contributed little as a rookie before going on injured reserve.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

**K Dustin Hopkins, KOR Byron Marshall, PR Jamison Crowder, LS *Nick Sundberg, P Tress Way**

Hopkins hit 26 of 29 field goals and was 4-for-5 beyond 50 yards. He also made 25 of 26 extra points. Way had a great season with 41 punts dropped inside the 20 to help the Redskins control field position. Sundberg has been a mainstay since 2010, but a back injury forced him to injured reserve in December. The return game remains a black hole for Washington on punts and kickoffs.

**Asterisk indicates player ended 2018 season on a reserve list.*

## TOP 3 NEEDS

### INSIDE LINEBACKER

The Redskins could move on from Zach Brown and Mason Foster. They need more speed and youth at this position.

### SAFETY

A problem mitigated with the addition of D.J. Swearinger two years ago is now an issue again after the Redskins cut him.

### QUARTERBACK

Alex Smith's disastrous leg injury leaves everything in question. The Redskins owe him big money. Even if Colt McCoy is the starter for 2019, it's time to spend a first- or second-day pick on a quarterback.

## 2018 DRAFT RECAP

| PK | NAME | POS | COLLEGE | COMMENT | GP/GS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Daron Payne | DE | Alabama | No. 13 overall pick was perfect complement to former Alabama teammate Jonathan Allen. | (16/16) |
| 2 | Derrius Guice | RB | LSU | On his way to starting job before tearing ACL in his left knee in the preseason. | (0/0) |
| 3 | Geron Christian Sr. | T | Louisville | Brought in as a project for a team that has two established starters. | (2/0) |
| 4 | Troy Apke | S | Penn State | Injuries in training camp limited him to spot duty and eventually injured reserve. | (2/0) |
| 5 | Tim Settle | NT | Virginia Tech | Had a nice training camp to earn a roster spot and appeared in every game as a reserve. | (16/0) |
| 6 | Shaun Dion Hamilton | ILB | Alabama | By the end he took playing time away from veteran Zach Brown. | (16/4) |
| 7 | Greg Stroman | CB | Virginia Tech | Rookie was forced to play early given the offseason changes at cornerback. | (15/3) |
| 7 | Trey Quinn | WR | SMU | Final pick in draft; flashed promise as a slot receiver but had two stints on injured reserve. | (3/2) |

Daron Payne

**SUMMARY: Promising class where Payne was perfect fit on team needing to improve run defense. How Guice contributes next year will tell the story.**

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